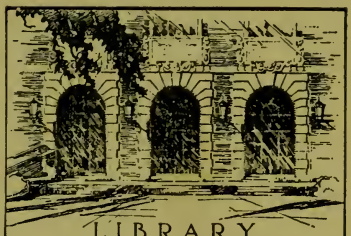
MONICA

by

E. EVERETT-GREEN



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MONICA.

MONICA.

A Novel.

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN.

Author of

"TORWOOD'S TRUST," "THE LAST OF THE DACRES,"
"RUTHVEN OF RUTHVEN," ETC.

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MONICA

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CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

MRS. BELLAMY.

Randolph was gone; and Monica, left alone in her luxurious London house, felt strangely lost and desolate. Her husband had expressed a wish that she should go out as much as possible, and not shut herself up in solitude during his brief absence, and to do his will was now her great desire. She would have preferred to remain quietly at home. She liked best to sit by her fire upstairs, and make Wilberforce tell her of Randolph's childhood and boyish days; his

devotion to his widowed mother, his kindness to herself, all the deeds of youthful prowess, which an old nurse treasures up respecting her youthful charges and delights to repeat in after years. Wilberforce would talk of Randolph by the hour together if she were not checked, and Monica felt singularly little disposition to check her.

However she obeyed her husband in everything, and took her morning's ride as usual next day, and was met by Cecilia Bellamy, who rode beside her, with her train of cavaliers in attendance, and pitied the poor darling child who had been deserted by her husband.

"I am just in the same sad predicament myself, Monica," she said, plaintively. "My husband has had to go to Paris, all of a sudden, and I am left alone too. We

must console ourselves together. You must drive with me to-day and come to tea, and I will come to you to-morrow."

Monica tried in vain to beg off; Cecilia only laughed at her. Monica had not *savoir faire* enough to parry skilful thrusts, nor insincerity enough to plead engagements that did not exist. So she was monopolised by Mrs. Bellamy in her morning's ride, was driven out in her carriage that same afternoon, and taken to several houses where her friend had "just a few words" to say to the hostess. She was taken back to tea, and had to meet Conrad, who received her with great warmth, and had the bad taste to address her by her Christian name before a whole roomful of company, and who ended by insisting on walking home with her. Yet his manner was so quiet

and courteous, and he seemed so utterly unconscious of her disfavour, that she was half ashamed of it, despite her very real annoyance.

And the worst of it was that there seemed no end to the attentions pressed upon her by the indefatigable Cecilia. Monica did not know how to escape from the manifold invitations and visits that were showered upon her. She seemed fated to be for ever in the society of Mrs. Bellamy and her friends. Beatrice Wentworth and her brother were themselves out of town ; Randolph was detained longer than he had at first anticipated, and Monica found herself drawn in an imperceptible way—against which she rebelled in vain—into quite a new set of people and places.

Monica was a mere baby in Cecilia's

hands. She had not the faintest idea of any malice on the part of her friend. She felt her attentions oppressive; she disliked the constant encounters with Conrad; but she tried in vain to free herself from the hospitable tyranny of the gay little woman. She was caught in some inexplicable way, and without downright rudeness she could not escape.

As a rule, Conrad was very guarded and discreet, especially when alone with her. He often annoyed her by his assumption of familiarity in presence of others, but he was humble enough for the most part, and took no umbrage at her rather pointed avoidance of him. She did not know what he was trying to do: how he was planning a subtle revenge upon his enemy her husband—the husband she was beginning

unconsciously yet very truly to love. She shrank from him without knowing why, but the day was rapidly approaching when her eyes were to be opened.

Her instincts were so true that it was not easy to deceive her for long. Ignorance of the world and reluctance to suspect evil blinded her for a time; but she was to learn the true nature of her so-called friends before long.

There had been a small picnic party at Richmond one day. Monica had tried hard to excuse herself from attending, but had been laughed and coaxed into consent. It mattered the less what she did now, for her husband was to be at home the following day, and in the gladness of that thought she could almost enjoy the sunshine, the fresh air, the sight of green grass and

waving trees, the country sights and sounds to which she had so long been a stranger.

The party, too, was small, and though Conrad was of the number, he held aloof from Monica, for which she was glad, for she had felt an increasing distrust of him of late. It was an equestrian party, and the long ride was a pleasure to Monica, who could have spent a whole day in the saddle without fatigue.

And then her husband was coming. He would set all right. She would tell him everything—she had not felt able to do so in the little brief notes she had written to him—and she would take his advice for the future, and decline friendship with all who could not be his friends too. Everything would be right when Randolph came back.

Then Monica was glad of an opportunity of a little quiet talk with Cecilia Bellamy. The wish for a private interview with her had been one of the reasons which had led her to consent to be one of to-day's party. She had something on her mind she wished to say to her in private, and as yet she had found no opportunity of doing so.

Yet it was not until quite late in the afternoon that Monica's opportunity came; when it did, she availed herself of it at once. She and her friend were alone in a quiet part of the park; nobody was very near to them.

"Cecilia," said Monica, "there is something I wish to say to you now that we are alone together. I am very much obliged to you for being so friendly during my

husband's absence—but—but—it is difficult to say what I mean—but I think you ought not to have had your brother so much with you when you were asking me; or rather I think, as he is your brother, whilst I am only a friend, the best plan would be for us to agree not to attempt to be very intimate. We have drifted apart with the lapse of years, and there are reasons, as you know, why it is not advisable for me to see much of your brother. I am sure you understand me without any more words."

"Oh, perfectly!" said Mrs. Bellamy with a light laugh. "Poor child, what an ogre he is! Well, at least, we have made the best of the little time he allowed us."

Monica drew herself up very straight.

"I do not understand you, Cecilia.

Please to remember that you are speaking of my husband."

Mrs. Bellamy laughed again.

"I am in no danger of forgetting, my dear. Please do not trouble yourself to put on such old-fashioned airs with me; as if every one did not know your secret by this time."

Monica turned upon her with flashing eyes.

"What secret?"

"The secret of your unhappy marriage, my love. It was obviously a *mariage de convenance* from the first, and you take no pains to disguise the fact that it will never be anything else. As Randolph Trevlyn is rather a fascinating man, there is only one rational interpretation to be put upon your persistent indifference."

Monica stood as if turned to stone.

"What?"

"Why, that your heart was given away before he appeared on the scene. People like little pathetic romances, and there is something in the style of your beauty, my dear, that makes you an object of interest wherever you go. You are universally credited with a 'history' and a slowly breaking heart—an equally heart-broken lover in the background. You can't think how interested we all are in you—and——"

But the sentence was not finished. Mrs. Bellamy's perceptions were not fine, but something in Monica's face deterred her from permitting her brother's name to pass her lips. It was easy to see that no suspicion of his connection with the

"romance" concocted for her by gossiping tongues had ever crossed her mind. But she was sternly indignant, and wounded to the quick by what she had heard.

She spoke not a word, but turned haughtily away and sought for solitude in the loneliest part of the park. She was terribly humiliated. She knew nothing of the inevitable chatter and gossip, half good-humoured, half mischievous, with which idle people indulge themselves about their neighbours, especially if that neighbour happens to be a beautiful woman, with an unknown past and an apparent trouble upon her. She did not know that spite on Conrad's part, and flighty foolishness on that of his sister, had started rumours concerning her. She only felt that she had by her ingratitude and coolness towards the

husband who had sacrificed so much for her, and whom she sincerely respected, and almost loved, had been the means of bringing his name and hers within the reach of malicious tongues, had given rise to cruel false rumours she hated ever to think of. If only her husband were with her!—at least he would soon be with her, and if for very shame she could not repeat the cruel words she had heard, at least she could show to all the world how false and base they were.

Monica woke up at last to the fact that it was getting late, and that she was in a totally strange place, far away from the rest of the party. She turned quickly and retraced her steps. She seldom lost her bearings, and was able to find her way back without difficulty, but

she had strayed farther than she knew; it took her some time to reach the glade in which they had lunched, and when she arrived there she found it quite deserted. There was nothing for it but to go back to the hotel, whither she supposed the others had preceded her, but when she reached the courtyard no one was to be seen but Conrad, who held her horse and his own.

"Ah, Monica! here you are. We missed you just at starting. Did you lose yourself in the park? Nobody seemed to know what had become of you."

"I suppose I walked rather too far. Where are the rest?"

"Just started five minutes ago. We only missed you then. I said I'd wait. We shall catch them up in two minutes."

As this was Mrs. Bellamy's party, and

Conrad was her brother, this mark of courtesy could not be called excessive, yet somehow it displeased Monica a good deal.

"Where is my groom?"

Conrad looked round innocently enough.

"I suppose he joined the calvacade, stupid fellow! Stablemen are so very gregarious. Never mind; we shall be up with them directly."

And Monica was forced to mount and ride after the party with Conrad.

But they did not come up with the others, despite his assurances, and the fact that they rode very fast for a considerable time. He professed himself very much astonished, and declared that they must have made a stupid blunder, and have gone by some other road.

"In that case, Sir Conrad," said Monica,

"I will dispense with your escort. I am perfectly well able to take care of myself alone."

He read her displeasure in her face and voice. She had an instinct that she had been tricked, but it was not a suspicion she could put into words.

"*Sir* Conrad!" he repeated, with gentle reproach. "Have I offended you, Monica?"

"Sir Conrad, it is time we should understand one another," said Monica, turning her head towards him. "I made you a sort of promise once—a promise of friendship I believe it was. I am not certain that I ever ought to have given it; but after my marriage with a man you hold as an enemy, it is impossible that I can look upon you as a true friend. I do not judge

or condemn you, but I do say that we had better meet as infrequently as possible, and then as mere acquaintances. You have strained your right of friendship, as it is, by the unwarrantable and persistent use of my Christian name, which you must have known was not for you to employ now. We were playfellows in childhood, I know, but circumstances alter cases, and our circumstances have greatly changed. It must be Sir Conrad and Lady Monica now between you and me, if ever we meet in future."

His eyes gleamed with that wild beast ferocity that lay latent in his nature, but his voice was well under command.

"Your will is law, Lady Monica. It is hard on me, but you know best. I will accept any place that you assign me."

She was not disarmed by his humility.

"I assign you no place; and you know that what I say is not hard. We are not at Trevlyn now. You know your own world well; I am only just beginning to know it. You had no right ever to take liberties that could give occasion for criticism or remark."

He looked keenly at her, but she was evidently quite unconscious of the game he had tried to play for the amusement of his little circle. She only spoke in general terms.

"There was a time, Monica," he said gently, "when you cared less what the world would say."

"There was a time, Sir Conrad," she answered, with quiet dignity, "when I knew less what the world might say."

Had Monica had the least suspicion of

what her companion had tried to make it say, she would not now have been riding with him along the darkening streets, just as carriages were rolling by carrying people to dinner or to the theatres.

Twice she had imperatively dismissed him, but he had absolutely declined to leave her.

"I will not address another word to you if my presence is distasteful to you," he said; "but you are my sister's guest, and in the absence of her husband I stand in the place of your host. I will not leave you to ride home at this late hour alone. At the risk of incurring your displeasure I attend you to your own door."

Monica did not protest after that, but she hardly addressed a single word to her silent companion.

As she rode up to her own house she saw that the door stood open. The groom was there, with his horse. He was in earnest converse with a tall, broad-shouldered man, who held a hunting-whip in his hand, and appeared about to spring into the saddle.

Monica's heart gave a sudden leap. Who was that other man standing with his back to her on the pavement? He turned quickly at the sound of her approach—it was her husband.

He looked at her and her companion in perfect silence. Conrad took off his hat, murmured a few incoherent words, and rode quickly away. Randolph's hand closed like a vice upon his whip, but he only gave one glance at the retreating figure, and then turned quietly to his wife

and helped her to dismount. The groom took the horse, and without a word from anyone, husband and wife passed together into the house. And this was the meeting to which Monica had looked forward with so much trembling joy.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

RANDOLPH'S STORY.

RANDOLPH led his wife upstairs to the drawing-room, and closed the door behind them. It was nine o'clock, and the room was brightly illuminated. Randolph was in dinner dress, as though he had been some time at home. His face was pale, and wore an expression of stern repression more intense than anything Monica had ever seen there before. She was profoundly agitated—agitated most of all by the feeling that he was near her again; the husband that she had pined for without knowing that she pined. Her agitation

was due to a kind of tumultuous joy more than to any other feeling, but she hardly knew this herself, and no one else would have credited it, from the whiteness of her face, and the strained look it wore. As a matter of fact, she was physically and mentally exhausted. She had gone through a great deal that day; she had eaten little, and that many hours ago; she was a good deal prostrated, though hardly aware of it —a state in which nervous tension made her unusually susceptible of impression; and she trembled and shrank before the displeasure in her husband's proud face. Would he look like that if he really loved her? Ah, no! no! She shrank a little more into herself.

Randolph did not hurry her. He took off his overcoat leisurely, and laid his

whip down upon the table. He looked once or twice at her as she sat pale and wan in the arm-chair whither he had led her. Then he came and stood before her.

"Monica, what have you to say to me?"

She looked up at him with an expression in her dark eyes that moved and touched him. Something of the severity passed from his face; he sat down, too, and laid his hand upon hers.

"You poor innocent child," he said quietly, "I do not even believe you know that you have done wrong."

"I do, Randolph," she answered. "I do know, but not as you think—I could not help that. I hated it—I hate him; but to-night I could not help myself. Where I was wrong was in not doing as you asked—

persisting in judging for myself. But how could I know that people could be so cruel, so unworthy, so false? Randolph, I should like to-night to know that I should never see one of them again!"

She spoke with a passionate energy that startled him. He had never seen her excited like this before.

"What have they been saying to you?" he asked in surprise.

"Ah! don't ask me. It is too hateful! It was Cecilia. She seemed to think it was amusing—a capital joke. Ah! how can people be so unwomanly, so debased!"

She put her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out some hideous image. "Yes, I will tell you, Randolph—I will. I owe it to you, because—because — oh, because there is just enough truth to make it so

terribly bitter. She said that people knew it was not an ordinary marriage, ours—she called it a *mariage de convenance.* She said everybody knew we had not fallen in love with one another." Monica's hand was still pressed over her eyes; she could not look at her husband. "She said I showed it plainly, that I let every one see. I never meant to, Randolph, but perhaps I did. I don't know how to pretend. But oh, she said people thought it was because I cared—for some one else—that I had married you whilst I loved some one else—and that is all a wicked, wicked lie! You believe that, Randolph, do you not?"

She rose up suddenly and he rose too, and they stood looking into each other's eyes.

"You believe that at least, Randolph?"

she asked, and wondered at the stern sorrow visible in every line of his face.

"Yes, Monica, I believe that," he answered, very quietly; yet, in spite of all his yearning tenderness there was still some sternness in his manner, for he was deeply moved, and knew that the time had come when at all costs he must speak out. "I, too, have heard that false rumour, and have heard—which I hope you have not—the name of the man to whom your heart is supposed to be given. Shall I tell it you? His name is Conrad Fitzgerald."

Monica recoiled as if he had struck her, and put both her hands before her face. Randolph continued speaking in the same concise way.

"Let me tell you my tale now, Monica. I left Scotland early this morning, finishing

business twelve hours earlier than I expected. I wired from Durham to you; but you had left the house before my telegram reached. In the train, during the last hour of the journey, some young fellows got in, who were amusing themselves by idle repetition of current gossip. I heard my wife's name mentioned more than once, coupled with that of Sir Conrad Fitzgerald, in whose company she had evidently been frequently seen of late. I reached home—Lady Monica was out for the day with Mrs. Bellamy—presumably with Sir Conrad also. I dined at my club, to hear from more than one source that the world was gossiping about my handsome wife and Sir Conrad Fitzgerald. I came home at dusk to find the groom just returned, with the news that Sir Conrad

was bringing my lady home, that he was dismissed from attendance; and in effect the man whose acquaintance I repudiate, whose presence in my house is an insult, rides up to my door in attendance upon my wife. Before I say any more, tell me your story. Monica, let me hear what you have been doing whilst I have been away."

Monica, roused to a passionate indignation by what she heard—an indignation that for the moment seemed to include the husband, who had uttered such cruel, wounding words, told her story with graphic energy. She was grateful to Randolph for listening so calmly and so patiently. She was vaguely aware that not all men would show such forbearance and self-control. She knew she had wounded

him to the quick by her indiscretion and self-will, but he gave her every chance to exculpate herself. When she had told her story, she stood up very straight before him. Let him pronounce sentence upon her; she would bear it patiently if she could.

"I see, Monica," he answered, very quietly, "I understand. It is not all your fault. You have only been unguarded. You have been an innocent victim. It is Fitzgerald's own false tongue that has set on foot these idle, baseless rumours. It is just like him."

Monica recoiled again.

"Just like him! but, Randolph, he is my friend!"

A stern look settled upon Randolph's face.

"Oblige me, Monica, by withdrawing that word. He is *not* your friend; and he is my enemy."

"Your enemy?"

"Yes; and *this* is how he tries to obtain his revenge."

Monica was trembling in every limb.

"I do not understand," she said.

"Sit down, then, and I will tell you."

She obeyed, but he did not sit down. He stood with his back against the chimney-piece, the light from the chandelier falling full upon his stern resolute face, with its handsome features and luminous dark eyes.

"You say you know the story of Fitzgerald's past?"

"Yes; he forged a cheque. His sister told me."

Randolph looked at her intently.

"Was that *all* she told you?"

"Yes; she said it was all. He deceived a friend and benefactor, and committed a crime. Was not that enough?"

"Not enough for Fitzgerald, it seemed," answered Randolph, significantly. "Monica, I am glad you did not know more, since you have met that man as a friend. Forgiveness is beautiful and noble—but there are limits. I will tell you the whole story, but in brief. The Colonel Hamilton of whom you heard in connection with the forgery was Fitzgerald's best and kindest friend. He was a friend of my mother's and of mine. I knew him intimately, and saw a good deal of his *protégé* at his house and at Oxford. I did not trust him at any time. It was no very great surprise when, after a

carefully concealed course of vulgar dissipation, he ended by disgracing himself in the way you have heard described. It cut Hamilton to the quick. 'Why did not the lad come to me if he was in trouble? I would have helped him,' he said. He let me into the secret, for I happened to be staying with him at the time; but it was all hushed up. Fitzgerald was forgiven, and vowed an eternal gratitude, as well as a complete reformation in his life."

"Did he keep his promise?" asked Monica in a whisper.

"You shall hear how," answered Randolph, with a gathering sternness in his tone not lost upon Monica. "From that moment it seemed as if a demon possessed him. I believe--it is the only excuse or explanation to be offered—that

there is a taint of insanity in his blood, and that with him it takes, or took, the form of an inexplicable hatred towards the man to whom he owed so much. About this time, Colonel Hamilton, till then a bachelor, married a friendless, beautiful young wife, to whom in his very quiet and undemonstrative way he was deeply and passionately attached, as she was to him. But she was very young and very inexperienced, and when that man, with his smooth false tongue, set himself to poison her life by filling her mind with doubts of her husband's love, he succeeded but too well. She spoke no word of what she suffered, but withdrew herself in her morbid jealous distress. She broke the faithful heart that loved her, and she broke her own too. It sounds a wild and foolish tale, per-

haps, to one who does not understand the mysteries of a passionate love such as that; but it is all too true. I had been absent from England for some time, but came home, all unconscious of what had happened, to find my friend Hamilton in terrible grief. His young wife lay dying—dying of a rapid decline, brought on, it was said, by mental distress; and worse than all, she could not endure her husband's presence in the room, but shrank from him with inconceivable terror and excitement. He was utterly broken down by distress. He begged me to see her, and to learn if I could, the cause of this miserable alteration. I did see her. I did get her to tell her story. I heard what Conrad Fitzgerald had done; and I was able, I am thankful to say, to relieve her mind of its terrible fear, and

to bring her husband to her before the end had come. She died in his arms, happy at the last; but she died; and he, in his broken-hearted misery for her loss, and for the treachery of one he had loved almost as a son, did not survive her for long. Within six months, my true, brave friend followed her to the grave.

"I was with him to the end. I need hardly say that Fitzgerald did not attempt to come near him. He was plunged in a round of riotous dissipation. Upon the day following the funeral, I chanced to come upon him, surrounded by a select following of his boon companions. Can I bring myself to tell you what he was saying before he knew that I was within earshot? I need not repeat his words, Monica: they

are not fit for your ears. Suffice it to say that he was passing brutal jests upon the man who had just been laid in his grave, and upon the young wife whose heart had been broken by his own base and cruel slanders. Coupled with these jests were disgraceful boastings, as unmanly and false as the lips that uttered them.

"I had in my hand a heavy riding-whip. I took him by the collar, and I made him recant each one of those cruel slanders he had uttered, and confess himself a liar and a villain. I administered, then and there, such a chastisement as I hope never to have to administer to any man again. No one interposed between us. I think even his chosen companions felt that he was receiving no more than his due. I thrashed him like the miserable hound he was. If it

had been possible, I would have called him out and shot him like a dog."

Randolph's voice had not risen whilst he was speaking. He was very calm and composed as he told his story; there was no excitement in his manner, and yet his quiet, quivering wrath thrilled Monica more than the fiercest invective could have done.

"My whip broke at last. I flung him from me, and he lay writhing on the floor. But he was not past speech, and he had energy left still to curse me to my face, and to vow upon me a terrible vengeance, which should follow me all my life. He is trying now to keep this vow. History repeats itself you know. He ruined the happiness of one life, and brought about this tragedy, by poisoning the mind of a wife, and setting her against her husband; and I presume

he thinks that experiment was successful enough to be worth repeating. There, Monica, I have said my say. You have now before you a circumstantial history of the past life of Sir Conrad Fitzgerald—your friend."

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

STORM AND CALM.

Monica sat with her face buried in her hands, her whole frame quivering with emotion. Those last words of her husband's smote her almost like a blow. She deserved them, no doubt; yet they were cruel, coming like that. He could not have spoken so if he loved her. He would not stand coldly aloof whilst she suffered, if he held her really dear. And yet, once he had almost seemed to love her, till she had alienated him by her pride and self-will. It was just, she admitted, yet, oh! it was very hard!

She sat, crushed and confounded, for a time, and it was only by a great effort that she spoke at all.

"I did not know, Randolph; I did not know. You should have told me before."

"I believed you did know. You told me that you did."

"Not that. Did you think I could know *that* and treat him as a friend? Oh, Randolph! how could you? You ought to have told me before."

"Perhaps I ought," he said. "But remember, Monica, I spoke out very plainly, and still you insisted that he was, and should continue to be, your friend—your repentant friend."

Monica raised her eyes to her husband's face, full of a sort of mute reproach. She felt that she merited the rebuke—that he

might have said much more without being really harsh—and yet it was very hard, in this hour of their re-union, to have to hear, from lips that had never uttered till then anything but words of gentleness and love, these reproofs and strictures on her conduct. She saw that he was moved: that there was a repressed agitation and excitement in his whole manner; but she could not guess how deeply he had been roused and stirred by the careless jests he had heard passed that day, nor how burning an indignation he felt towards the man who had plotted to ruin his happiness.

"You should not have left me, Randolph," said Monica, "if you could not trust me."

He went up to her quietly, and took her

hands. She stood up, looking straight into his eyes.

"I did trust you—I do trust you," he answered, with subdued impetuosity. "Can I look into your face and harbour one doubt of your goodness and truth? I trust *you* implicitly; it is your judgment, not your heart, that has been at fault."

She looked up gratefully, and drew one step nearer.

"And now that you have come back, all will be right again," she said. "Randolph, I will never speak to that man again."

His face was stern; it wore a look she did not understand.

"I am not sure of that," he answered, speaking with peculiar incisiveness. "It may be best that you *should* speak to him again."

She looked up, bewildered.

"Randolph, why do you say that? Do you think that, after all, he has repented?"

Randolph's face expressed an unutterable scorn. She read the meaning of that glance, and answered it as if it had been expressed in words.

"Randolph, do you believe for a moment that I would permit any one to speak ill of you to me? Am I not your wife?"

His face softened as he looked at her, but there was a good deal of sadness there, too.

"I do not believe you would deliberately listen to such words from him; but are not poisoned shafts launched sometimes that strike home and rankle? Has no one ever come between you and me, since

the day you gave yourself to me in marriage ?"

He saw her hesitation, and a great sadness came into his eyes. How near she was and yet how far! His heart ached for her in her loneliness and isolation, and it ached for himself too.

Monica broke the silence first.

"Randolph," she said timidly; "no harm has been done to you, really? He cannot hurt you ; can he ?"

His face was stern as he answered her.

"He will hurt me if he can—through my wife. His threat is still unfulfilled; but he knows where to plant a blow, how to strike in the dark. Yes, Monica, he has hurt me."

She drew back a pace."

"How ?"

"It hurts me to know that idle gossip connects my wife's name with his—that he has the credit of being a lover, discarded only from motives of policy. I know that there is not a syllable of truth in these reports—that they have been set afloat by his malicious tongue. Nevertheless, they hurt me. They hurt me the more because my wife has given some countenance to such rumours, by permitting a certain amount of intimacy with a man whom her husband will not receive."

Monica was white to the lips. She understood now, as she had never done before, what Cecilia Bellamy had meant by her flighty speeches a few hours before. They had disgusted and offended her then, now they appeared like absolute insults. Randolph saw the stricken look upon her

face, and knew that she was cut to the quick.

"Monica," he said, more gently, "what has been done can be undone by a little patience and self-control. We need not be afraid of a man like Sir Conrad. I have known him and his ways long. He has tried before to injure me without success. He has tried in a more subtle way this time; yet again I say, most emphatically, that he has failed."

But Monica hardly heard. She was torn by the tumult of her shame and distress.

"Randolph!" she exclaimed, stretching out her hands towards him: "Randolph, take me home! oh! take me home, out of this cruel, cruel, wicked world! I cannot live here. It kills me; it stifles the very life out of me! I am so miserable, so

desolate here! It is all so hard, and so terrible! Take me home! Ah! I was happy once!"

"I will take you to Trevlyn, Monica, believe me, as soon as ever I can; but it cannot be just yet. Shall I tell you why?"

She recoiled from him once more, putting up her hand with that instinctive gesture of distress.

"You are very cruel to me Randolph," she said, with the sharpness of keen misery in her voice.

He stood quite still, looking at her, and then continued in the same quiet way:

"Shall I tell you why? I cannot take you away until we have been seen together as before. I shall go with you to some of

those houses you have visited without me. We must be seen riding and driving, and going about as if nothing whatever had occurred during my absence. If we meet Fitzgerald, there must be nothing in your manner or in mine to indicate that he is otherwise than absolutely indifferent to us. I dare say he will put himself in your way. He would like to force upon me the part of the jealous, distrustful husband, but it is a *rôle* I decline to play at his bidding. I am not jealous, nor am I distrustful, and he and all the world shall see that this is so. If I take you away now, Monica, I shall give occasion for people to say that I am afraid to trust my wife in any place where she may meet Fitzgerald. Let us stay where we are, and ignore the foolish rumours he has circu-

lated, and we shall soon see them drop into deserved oblivion."

"Randolph, I cannot! I cannot!" cried Monica, who was now overwrought and agitated to the verge of exhaustion; "I *cannot* stay here. I cannot go amongst those who have dared to say such things, to believe such things of me. What does it matter what they think, when we are far away? Take me back to Trevlyn, and let us forget it all. Let me go, if only for a week. I have never asked you anything before. Oh! Randolph, do not be so hard! Say that you will take me home!"

"If I loved you less, Monica," he answered, in a very low, gentle tone, "I should say yes. As it is, I say no. I cannot take you to Trevlyn yet."

She turned away then, and left him without a word, passing slowly through the brilliantly-lighted room, and up the wide staircase. Randolph sat down and rested his head upon his hand, and a long-drawn sigh rose up from the very depths of his heart. This interview had tried him quite as much as it had done Monica—possibly even more.

"Perhaps, after all, Fitzgerald *has* revenged himself," he muttered, "though not in a way he anticipated. Ah, Monica! my fair young wife, why cannot you trust me a little more?"

Monica trusted him far more than he knew. It was not in anger that she had left him. In the depth of her heart she believed that he had judged wisely and well; it was only the wave of home-sickness sweeping

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over her that had urged her to such passionate pleading. And then his strong, inflexible firmness gave her a curious sense of rest and confidence. She herself was so torn and rent by conflicting emotions, by bewilderment and uncertainty, that his resolute determination and singleness of purpose were as a rock and tower of defence. She had called him cruel in the keen disappointment of the moment, but she knew he was not really so. Home-sick, aching for Trevlyn as she was—irrepressibly as she shrank from the idea of facing those to whom she had given cause to say that she did not love her husband, she felt that his decision was right. It might be hard, but it was necessary, and she would go through her part unflinchingly for his sake. It was the least that she could do to make

amends for the unconscious wrong she had done him.

She felt humbled to the very dust, utterly distrustful of herself, and quite unworthy of the gentleness and forbearance her husband showed towards her. How much he must be disappointed in her! How hard he must feel it to have married her out of kindness, and to be treated thus!

She was very quiet and submissive during the days that followed, doing everything he suggested, studying in all things to please him, and to make up for the past. In society she was more bright and less silent than she had been heretofore. She was determined not to appear unhappy. No one should in future have cause to say that her present life was not congenial

to her. Certainly, if anyone took the trouble to watch her now, it would easily be seen that she was no longer indifferent to her husband. Her eyes often followed him about when he was absent from her side. She always seemed to know where he was, and to turn to him with a sort of instinctive welcome when he came back to her. This clinging to him was quite unconscious, the natural result of her confidence in his strength and protecting care; but it was visible to one pair of keenly jealous eyes, and Conrad Fitzgerald, when he occasionally found himself in company with Randolph and his wife, watched with a sense of baffled malevolence the failure of his carefully-planned scheme.

People began to talk now of the devotion of Mr. Trevlyn and Lady Monica with as

much readiness and carelessness as they had done about their visible estrangement. It takes very little to set idle tongues wagging, and every one admired the bride and liked the bridegroom, so that the good opinion of the world was not difficult to regain.

But Monica's peace of mind was less easily recovered. At home she was grave and sad, and he thought her cold; and the full and entire reconciliation—of which, indeed, at that time she would have felt quite unworthy—was not to be yet. Each was conscious of deep love on his or her own side, but could not read the heart of the other, and feared to break the existing calm by any attempt to ruffle the surface of the waters.

They were not very much alone, for

Lord Haddon and his sister spent many evenings with them when they were not otherwise engaged, and the intimacy between the two houses increased rapidly.

Monica had never again alluded to the prospective return to Trevlyn—the half-promise made by Randolph to take her back soon. She did not know what "soon" might mean, and she did not ask. She had grown content now to leave that question in his hands.

Once, when in the after-dinner twilight, she had been talking to Beatrice of her old home, the latter said, with eager vehemence:

"How you must long to see it again! How you must ache to be out of this tumult, and back with your beloved sea and cliffs and pine-woods! Don't you

hate our noisy, busy London? Don't you pine to go back?"

Monica was silent, pondering, as it seemed. She was thinking deeply. When she answered out of the fulness of her heart, her words startled even herself.

"I don't think I do. I missed the quiet and rest at first, but, you see, my husband is here; I do not pine when I have him."

Beatrice's eyes grew suddenly wistful. "Ah, no!" she answered. "I can understand that."

But after a long silence she rallied herself and asked:

"But is he not going to take you back? Do you not want to see your father and brother again?"

"Yes, if Randolph is willing to take me; but it must be as he likes."

"He will like what will please you best."

Monica smiled a little.

"No; he will like what is best, and I shall like it too."

Beatrice studied her face intently.

"Do you know, Monica, that you have changed since I saw you first?"

Monica passed her hand across her brow. What a long time it seemed since that first meeting in the park!

"Have I?"

"Yes. Do you know I used to have a silly fancy that you did not much care for Randolph? It was absurd and impertinent, I know; but Haddon had brought such a strange account of your sudden wedding, called you the 'snow bride,' and had somehow got an idea that it had all

been rather cold and sad—forgetting, of course, that the sadness was on account of your father's health. I suppose I got a preconceived idea; and do you know, when first I knew you I used to think of you as the 'snow-bride,' and fancy you very cold to everyone—especially to Randolph; and now that I see more of you and know you better, it is just as plain that you love him with all your heart and soul."

Monica sat quite still in the darkness, turning about the ring upon her finger—the pledge of his wedded love. She was startled at hearing put into plain words the secret thought treasured deep down in her heart, but seldom looked into or analysed. Had it come to that? Did she indeed love him thus? Was that the reason

she yielded up herself and her future so trustfully and willingly to him?—the reason that she no longer yearned after Trevlyn as home, so long as he was at her side? Yes, that was surely it. Beatrice had spoken no more than the truth in what she said. She did love her husband heart and soul; but did he love her too? There lay the sting—she had proved unworthy of him: he must know it and feel it. She had been near to winning his heart; but alas! she had not won it—and now, now perhaps it was too late. And yet the full truth was like a ray of sunshine in her heart. Might she not yet win his love by the depth and tenderness of her own? Something deep down within her said that the land of promise lay, after all, not so very far away.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH.

A SUMMONS TO TREVLYN.

"RANDOLPH! Randolph! Why did you not take me home when I begged so hard to go? It was cruel! cruel! And now it is too late!"

This irrepressible cry of anguish burst from Monica in the first moments of a terrible, overmastering grief. An open telegram in Randolph's hand announced the sudden death of Lord Trevlyn. He had just broken to his wife, with as much gentleness as he could, the news of this crushing sorrow. It was hardly unnatural that she should remember, in such a

moment, how eloquently she had pleaded a few weeks back to be taken home to Trevlyn, yet she repented the words before they had passed her lips, for she saw they had hurt her husband.

He was deeply grieved for her, his heart yearned over her, but his words were few.

"Can you be ready to start, Monica, by the noon express?"

She bent her head in a silent assent, and moved away as one who walks in a dream.

"Poor child!" he said softly, "poor child! If only my love could make up to you for what you have lost; but alas! that is not what you want."

It was a strange, sad, silent journey, almost as sad as the one in which Randolph

had brought his bride to London. He was taking her back at last to her childhood's home. Was he any nearer to her innermost self than he had been that day, now nearly three months ago?

He was hopeful that he had made an advance, and yet this sudden recall to Trevlyn disconcerted him. Apart from the question of the earl's death, there was another trouble, he believed, hanging over Monica's future. Tom Pendrill had been profiting by her absence to "experiment," as she would have called it, upon Arthur, with results that had surprised even him, though he had always believed the case curable if properly treated. Randolph had had nothing to do directly with the matter, but Tom had written lately, asking him to find out the best authorities on

spinal injuries, and get some one or two specialists to come and have a look at the boy. This Randolph had done at his own expense, and with the result, as he had heard a few days back, that Arthur was to be sent abroad for a year, to be under a German doctor, whose cures of similar cases had been bringing him into marked repute.

Monica had been, by Arthur's special wish, kept in ignorance of everything. He was eagerly anxious, even at the cost of considerable suffering, to submit to the prescribed treatment, feeling how much good he had already received from Tom's more severe remedies; but he knew how Monica shrank from the idea of anything that could give him pain, how terrible she would consider the idea of parting, how

vehemently she would struggle to thwart the proposed plan. So he had begged that she might be kept in ignorance till all was finally settled. Indeed, he had some idea, not entirely discouraged by Tom, of getting himself quietly removed to Germany in her absence, so that she might be spared all the anxiety, misery, and suspense.

Randolph could hardly have been acquitted of participation in the scheme, the whole cost of which was to fall upon him, and he wondered what Monica might think of his share in it. It had been no doing of his that she had not been told from the first. He had urged upon the others the unfairness of keeping her in the dark; but Arthur's vehement wish for secrecy had won the day, and he had held

his peace until he should be permitted to speak.

And now, what would happen? What was likely to be the result upon Monica of the inevitable disclosure? Would it not seem to her as if the first act of her husband, on succeeding to the family estate, was to banish from it the one being for whom she had so often bespoken his protection and brotherly care? Might she not fancy that he was in some way the originator of the scheme? Might she not be acute enough to see that but for him it never could have been carried out, owing to lack of necessary funds? Her father might have approved it, but he could not have forwarded it as Randolph was able to do. Might it not seem to her that he was trying to rid himself of an

unwelcome burden, and to isolate his wife from all whom she loved best? He could not forget some of the words she had spoken not very long after their marriage. Practically those words had been rescinded by what had followed, but that could hardly be so in this case. Monica's heart clung round Arthur with a passionate, yearning tenderness, that was one of the main-springs of her existence. What would she say to those who had banded together to take the boy from her?

Randolph's pre-occupation and gravity were not lost upon Monica, but she had no clue to their real cause. She felt that there was something in it of which she was ignorant, and there was a sort of sadness and constraint even in the suspicion of such a thing. She was unnerved and

miserable, and, although she well knew she had not merited her husband's full confidence, it hurt her keenly to feel that it was withheld from her.

Evening came on, a wild, melancholy stormy evening—is there anything more sad and dreary than a midsummer storm? It does not come with the wild, resistless might of a winter tempest, sweeping triumphantly along, carrying all before it in the exuberance of its power. It is a sad, subdued, moaning creature, full of eerie sounds of wailing and regret, not wrapped in darkness, but cloaked in misty twilight, grey and ghostlike — a pale, sorrowful, mysterious thing, that seems to know itself altogether out of place, and is haunted by its own melancholy and dreariness.

It was in the fast waning light of such a summer's evening that the portals of Trevlyn opened to welcome Monica again.

She was in the old familiar hall that once had been so dear to her—the place whose stern, grim desolation had held such charms for her. Why did she now gaze round her with dilated eyes, a sort of horror growing upon her? Why did she cling to her husband's arm so closely, as the frowning suits of mail and black carved faces stared at her out of the dusky darkness? Why was her first exclamation one of terror and dismay?

"Randolph! Randolph! This is not Trevlyn! It cannot be Trevlyn! Take me home! ah, take me home!"

There was a catch in her breath; she was shaken with nervous agitation and

exhaustion. It seemed to her that this ghostly place was altogether strange and terrible. She did not know that the change was in herself; she thought it was in her surroundings.

"What have they done to it? What have they done to Trevlyn? This is not my old home!"

Randolph took her in his arms, alarmed by her pale looks and manifest disquietude.

"Not know your own old home, Monica?" he said, half gravely, half playfully. "This is the only Trevlyn I have ever known. It is you that have half forgotten, you have grown used to something so very different."

Monica looked timidly about her, half convinced, yet not relieved of all her

haunting fears. What a strange, vast, silent place it was! Voices echoed strangely in it, resounding as it were from remote corners. Footsteps sounded hollow and strange as they came and went along the deserted passages. The staircase stretched upwards into blank darkness, suggesting lurking horrors. All was intensely desolate. Was this truly the home she had loved so well?

But Lady Diana appeared from one direction, and Tom Pendrill from another. Monica dropped her husband's arm and stood up, her calm, quiet self again.

Food was awaiting the travellers, and as they partook, or tried to partake of it, they heard all such particulars of the earl's sudden death as there were to hear. He had been as well as usual; indeed, during

the past week he had really appeared to gain in strength and activity. He had been out of doors on all fine days, and only yesterday had sat out for quite a long time upon the terrace. He had gone to bed apparently in his usual health; but when his man had gone to him in the morning he found him dead and cold. Tom Pendrill had come over at once, and had remained for the day, relieving Lady Diana from all trouble in looking after things, and thinking what was to be done. It was his opinion that the earl had died in his sleep, without a moment's premonition. It was syncope of the heart, and was most likely almost instantaneous. There had been no struggle and no pain, as was evident from his restful attitude and expression.

The next days passed sadly and heavily, and the earl was laid to rest amongst his forefathers in the family vault. Lady Diana took her departure, glad, after the strain and sorrow of the past days, to escape from surroundings so gloomy, and to solace herself for her long stay at Trevlyn, by a retreat to an atmosphere more congenial to her.

Monica was glad to see her go. She shrank from her sharp words and sharper looks. She longed to be alone with her husband, that she might try to win back his heart by her own deep love that she hid away so well.

But it was not easy even then to say what was in her heart. Randolph was busy from morning till night over the necessary business that must ensue upon

the death of a landed proprietor. Tom Pendrill, who had been much with the earl of late, remained to assist his successor; and both the men seemed to take it for granted that Monica would gladly be spared all business discussions, and devote herself to Arthur, from whom she had so long been separated.

Monica, very gentle and submissive, accepted the office bestowed upon her, and quietly bided her time. Despite the loss she had just sustained, she was not unhappy. How could she be unhappy when she had her husband? when she felt that every day they were drawing nearer and nearer together? She looked wistfully into his face sometimes, and saw the old proud, tender look shining upon her, thrilling her with wonderful gladness.

Some little shadow still hung over them, but it was rolling slowly away—the dawn was breaking in its golden glory—the time was drawing very near when each was to know the heart of the other wholly and entirely won.

She never shrank from hearing the new Lord Trevlyn called by his title ; but looked at him proudly and tenderly, feeling how well he bore the dignity, how nobly he would fulfil the duties now devolving upon him. She watched him day by day with quiet, loving solicitude. She saw his care for her in each act or plan, knew that he thought for her still, made her his first object, although she had disappointed him so grievously once. Her heart throbbed with joy to feel that this was so ; the sunshine deepened round her path day

by day. Just a little patience—just a little time to show him that the old distrust and insubordination were over, and he would give to her—she felt sure of it now—the love she prized above all else on earth.

Monica's face might be pale and grave in these days, yet it wore an added sweetness as each passed by, for her heart was full of strange new joy. She loved her husband—he loved her—their hearts were all but united.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH.

CHANGES.

"ARTHUR!"

"Aha! my lady! you did not expect that, did you? Now look here!"

Arthur, who was sitting up in an arm-chair—a thing Monica had never seen him do since that terrible fall from the cliffs years ago—now pulled himself slowly into a standing position, and by the help of a stout stick, shuffled a few paces to his couch, upon which he sank breathless, yet triumphant, though his drawn brow betrayed that the achievement was made at the cost of some physical pain.

"Arthur, don't! You will kill yourself!"

"On the contrary, I am going to cure myself—or rather, Tom and his scientific friends are going to cure me," answered Arthur, panting a little with the exertion, but very gay and confident. "Do you know, Monica, that for the last three months I have been at Tom's tender mercies, and you see what I can do at the end of that time? Randolph paid no end of money, I believe, to send down two big swells from London to overhaul me; and now—now what do you think is going to happen?"

"What?"

"The day after to-morrow I am going to start for Germany—for a place where there are mineral springs and things; and I am

going to stay there for a year, with a doctor who has cured people worse than me. Randolph is going to pay—isn't he just awfully good? And in a year, Monica, I shall come back to you well—cured! What do you think of that? Haven't we kept our secret well? Why, Monica, don't look like that! Aren't you pleased to think that I shall not be always a cripple?"

But Monica was too utterly astounded to be able to realise all at once what this meant.

"Arthur, I don't understand," she said at length. "You seeing doctors—you going to Germany! Whose doing is it all?"

"Whose? Randolph's practically, I suppose, since he finds the money for it."

"Why was not I told?"

"That was my doing. I felt that if you knew you would dissuade me. But you can't now, for in two days I shall be gone!"

"Was Randolph willing to keep a secret from me—about you?" asked Monica, slowly.

"No, he didn't like it. He wanted you to be told; but I wouldn't have it, and he gave in. I wanted to tell you myself when everything was fixed. Can you believe I am really going?"

"No, I can't. Do you want to go, Arthur —to leave Trevlyn?"

"I want to get well," he answered, eagerly. "If you had been lying on your back for years, Monica, you would understand."

"I do understand," answered Monica, clasping her hands. "Only—only——"

"Oh! yes, I know all that. It won't be pleasant. But I'd do more for a good chance of getting well. So now it's all settled, and I'm off the day after to-morrow!"

"You've not given me much time for my preparations."

Arthur laughed outright.

"Oh, you're not going—did you think you were? Why, you're Lady Trevlyn now—a full-blown countess. It would be too absurd, your tying yourself to me. Besides"—with a touch of manly gravity and purpose—"I wouldn't have you, Monica, not at any price. I can stand things myself, but I can't stand the look in your eyes. Besides, you know, it would

be absurd now—quite absurd. You're married, you know, and that changes everything."

Monica's face was hard to read.

"I should have thought that, even married, I might have been allowed to see you placed safely in the hands of this new doctor, after having been almost your only nurse all these years."

He stretched out his hand and drew her towards him, making her kneel down beside him, so that he could gaze right into her face.

"You must not look like that, you sweet, sensitive, silly sister," said Arthur, caressingly. "You must not think I have changed, because I wish to go away, and because I will not have you with me. I love you the same as ever. I know that

you love me, and if you want a proof of this you shall have it, for I am going to ask a favour of you—a very great favour."

Monica smoothed his hair with her hand.

"A favour, Arthur?—Something that I can grant? You know you have only to ask."

"I want you to lend me Randolph," he said, with a little laugh, as if amused at the form of words he had chosen. "I want to know if you can spare him for the journey. Tom is going to take me, but somehow, Tom—well, he is very clever and kind, but he does hurt me, there's no denying, and I don't feel quite resigned to be entirely at his mercy. But Randolph is different. He is so very strong, he moves

me twice as easily, and he is so awfully kind and gentle: he stops in a moment if he thinks it hurts. He has been here a good bit with Tom since he got back, and you can't think how different his handling is. I don't like to take him away from you. You must miss him so awfully: he is such a splendid fellow!"

"Have you said anything to Randolph about it?"

"Oh, no. I couldn't till I'd asked you. I do feel horrid to suggest such a thing; but you've made me selfish, you know, by spoiling me. It will take us three days to go; but he could come back much quicker. Tom is going to stop on for a bit, to study cures with this old fogey; so I shall have somebody with me. I'll not keep Randolph a day after I get landed

there, but I should like him for the journey uncommonly."

Monica stooped and kissed him. "I will arrange that for you," she said, quietly, and went away without another word.

She went slowly downstairs to the study, where her husband was generally to be found. She was dazed and confused by the astounding piece of news she had heard: hurt, pleased, hopeful, grieved, anxious, and half indignant all in one. Her indignation was all for Tom Pendrill, whom she had always regarded, where Arthur was concerned, something in the light of a natural foe. For her husband's quiet generosity and goodness she had nothing but the warmest gratitude. He would not be led away by professional

enthusiasm, or wish to inflict suffering upon Arthur just for the sake of scientific inquiry. He would not wish to send him from Trevlyn unless he believed that some great benefit would result from that banishment.

She smiled proudly as she thought of Conrad's old prediction fulfilling itself so exactly now. Once she would have felt this deed of his as a crushing blow, aimed at the very foundation of her love and happiness; now she only saw in it a new proof of her husband's single-minded love and strength. He would do even that which he knew would cause present pain, if he felt assured it were best to do so. He had proved his strength like this before, and she knew that he had been in the right. Should she distrust him now? Never

again! never again! She had done with distrust now. She loved him too truly to feel a shadow of doubt. Whatever he did must be true and right. She would find him now, and thank him for his goodness towards her boy.

She went straight to the study, full of this idea. Her eyes were shining strangely; her face showed that her feelings had been deeply stirred. But when she opened the door, she paused with a start expressive of slight discomfiture, for her husband was not alone—Tom Pendrill was with him. They had guide-books and a Continental Bradshaw open before them, and were deep in discussions and plans.

They looked up quickly as Monica appeared, and Randolph, seeing by her face that she knew all, nerved himself to

meet displeasure and misunderstanding. Monica could not say now what she had rehearsed on the way. Tom was there, and she was not sure that she quite forgave him, although she believed he acted from motives of kindness; but certainly she could not speak out before him. The words she had come prepared to utter died away on her lips, and her silence and whole attitude looked significant of deep-lying distress and displeasure.

"You have heard the news, Monica?" said Tom, easily.

"Yes, I have heard the news," she answered, very quietly. "Is it true that you take him away the day after to-morrow?"

"Quite true," answered Tom, looking very steadily at her. "Do you forgive us, Monica?"

She was silent for a moment; sort of quiver passed over her face.

"I am not quite sure if I forgive *you*," she answered in a low even tone.

She had not looked at her husband all this time, nor attempted to speak to him. She was labouring visibly under the stress of subdued emotion. Randolph believed he knew only too well the struggle that was going on within her.

"Monica," he said — and his voice sounded almost cold in his effort to keep it thoroughly under control—"I am afraid this has been a shock to you. I am sure you will feel it very much. Will you try to believe that we are acting as we believe for the best as regards Arthur's future, and pardon the mystery that has surrounded our proceedings?"

Monica gave him one quick look—so quick and transient that he could not catch the secret it revealed. She spoke very quietly.

"Everything has been settled, and I must accept the judgment of others. Results alone can quite reconcile me to the idea; but at least I have learned to know that I do not always judge best in difficult questions. Arthur wishes to go, and I will not stand in his way. There is only one thing that I want to ask," and she looked straight at her husband.

"What is that, Monica?"

"I want you to go with him, Randolph."

"You want me to go with him?"

"Yes, to settle him in his new quarters,

and to come and tell me all about it, and how he has borne the journey. Tom will not be back for weeks—and I don't know if I quite trust Tom's truthfulness. Will you go too, Randolph? I shall be happier if I know he is in your keeping as well."

He looked at her earnestly. Did she wish to get rid of him for a time? Was his presence distasteful to her after this last act of his? He could not tell, but his heart was heavy as he gave the required assent.

"I will do as you wish, Monica. If you do not mind being a few days alone at Trevlyn, I will go with Arthur. It is the least I can do, I suppose, after taking him away from you."

"Thank you, Randolph," she said, with one more of those inexplicable glances.

"I need not be alone at Trevlyn. Aunt Elizabeth will come, I am sure, and stay with me;" and she went quietly away without another word.

"I say, Trevlyn, you have tamed my lady pretty considerably," remarked Tom, when the men were alone together. "I expected no end of a shine when she found out, and she yields the point like a lamb. Seems to me you've cast a pretty good spell over her during the short time you've had her in hand."

Randolph pulled thoughtfully at his moustache as he turned again to the papers on the table. He did not reply directly to Tom's remark, but presently observed, rather as if it were the outcome of his own thoughts:

"All the same, I would give a good

deal if one of my first acts after coming into the property were not to banish Arthur from Trevlyn for a considerable and indeterminate time."

"Oh, bosh!" ejaculated Tom, taking up Bradshaw again. "Why, even Monica would never put a construction like that upon this business."

This day and the next flew by as if on wings. There was so much to think of, so much to do, and Monica had Arthur so much upon her mind, that she found no opportunity to say to Randolph what she had purposed doing in the heat of the moment. Speech was still an effort to her; her reserve was too deep to be easily overcome. She was busy and he was pre-occupied. When he returned she would tell him all, and thank

him for his generous goodness towards her boy.

"Monica," said Arthur, as she came to bid him good-night upon the eve of his journey—he had had a soothing draught administered, and was no longer excited, but quiet and drowsy—"Monica, you will be quite happy, will you not, with only Randolph now? You love him very much, don't you?"

She bent her head and kissed him.

"Yes, Arthur," she answered, softly. "I love him with all my heart."

"Just as he loves you," murmured Arthur. "I can see it in his face, in every tone of his voice, especially when he talks of you—which is pretty nearly always—we both like it so much. I am so glad you feel just the same. I thought you

did. I shall like to think about you so—how happy you will be!"

The next day after Arthur had been placed in the carriage that was to take him away from Trevlyn, and Monica had said her last adieu to him, and had turned away with pale face and quivering lips, she felt her hands taken in her husband's strong warm clasp.

"Monica," he said tenderly, "good-bye. I will take every care of him. You shall hear everything, and shall not regret, if I can help it, trusting him to me."

Monica looked up suddenly into his face, and put her arms about his neck. She did not care at that moment for the presence of Tom or of the servants. Her husband was leaving her—she had only thoughts for him.

"Take care of yourself, Randolph," she said, her voice quivering, and almost breaking. "Take care of yourself, and come back to me as quickly as you can. I shall miss you, oh! so much, till I have you safe home again. Good-bye, dear husband, good-bye!"

He held her for a moment in his arms. His heart beat tumultuously; for an instant everything seemed to recede, and leave him and his wife alone in the world together; but it was no time now to indulge in raptures. He kissed her brow and lips, and gently unloosed her clasp.

"Good-bye, my wife," he said gently. "God bless and keep you always."

The next moment the carriage was rolling rapidly away along the road,

Monica gazing after it, her soul in her eyes.

"Ah; my darling," said Mrs. Pendrill, coming and taking her by the hand, "it is very hard to part with him; but it was kind to Arthur to spare him, and it is only for a few days."

"I know, I know," answered Monica passing her hand across her eyes. "I would not have kept him here. Arthur wanted him so much—I can understand so well what he felt—it would have been selfish to hold him back. But it feels so lonely and desolate without him; as if everything were changed and different. I can't express it; but oh! I do feel it all so keenly."

Mrs. Pendrill pressed the hand she held.

"You love him, then, so very much?"

"Ah, yes," she answered; "how could I help it?"

"It makes me very happy to hear you say that. For I was sometimes rather afraid that you were hurried into marriage before you had learned to know your own heart, I thought."

Monica passed her hand across her brow.

"Was I hurried?" she asked dreamily. "It is so hard to remember all that now. It seems as if I had always loved Randolph —as if he had always been the centre of my life."

And Mrs. Pendrill was content. She said no more, asked no more questions.

"You know, Randolph," said Arthur to his kindest of nurses and attendants, as he

lay in bed at night, after rather a hard day's travelling, "I don't wonder now that you've so completely cut me out. I shouldn't have believed it possible once, but it seems not only possible, but natural enough, now that I know what kind of a fellow you are."

"What do you mean, my boy?" asked Randolph.

"Mean? Why, what I say to be sure. I understand now why you've so completely cut me out with Monica. I only hold quite a subordinate place in her affections now. It is quite right, and I shall never be jealous of you, old fellow; only mind you always let me be her brother. I can't give up that. You may have all the rest, though. You deserve it, and you've got it too, by her own showing."

Randolph started a little involuntarily.

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? why, that she loves you heart and soul, of course. You must know it as well as I, and I had it from her own lips."

* * * * *

"My wife, my wife!" said Randolph, as he paced beneath the starry heavens that night. "Then I was not deceived or mistaken—my wife—my Monica—my very own—God bless you, my darling, and bring me safe home to you and to your love!"

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH.

UNITED.

During the days that followed Monica lived as in one long, happy dream. The clouds all seemed to have rolled away, letting in the sunshine to the innermost recesses of her heart.

Why was she so calmly and serenely happy, despite the real sorrow hanging over her in the recent death of a tenderly-loved father? Why did even the loss of the brother, to whom she had vowed such changeless devotion, give her no special pang? She had felt his going much, yet it did not weigh her down with any load of

sorrow. She well knew why these changes were. The old love had not changed nor waned, but it had been eclipsed in the light of the deep wonderful happiness that had grown up in her heart, since she had come to know how well and faithfully she loved Randolph, and to believe at last in his love for her.

Yes, she no longer doubted that now. Something in the very perfectness of her own love drove away the haunting doubts and fears that had troubled her for so long. He had her heart, and she had his, and when once she had him home again the last shadow would have vanished away. How her heart beat as she pictured that meeting! How she counted the hours till she had him back!

Only once was she disturbed in her quiet, dreamy time of waiting.

Once, as she was riding through the loneliest part of the lonely pine wood, Conrad Fitzgerald suddenly stood in her path, gazing earnestly at her with a look she could not fathom.

Her face flushed and paled. She regarded him with a glance of haughty displeasure.

"Let me pass, Sir Conrad."

He did not move; he was still fixedly regarding her.

"I told you how it would be, Monica," he said. "I told you Arthur would be sent away."

She smiled a smile he did not understand.

"Let me pass," she said again.

His eyes began to glow dangerously. Her beauty and her scorn drove him to a sort of fury.

"Is this the way you keep your promise? Is this how you treat a man you have promised to call your friend?'

"My friend!" Monica repeated the words very slowly, with an inflection the meaning of which could not be misunderstood; nor did he affect to misunderstand her.

"Lady Monica," he said, "you have heard some lying story, I perceive, trumped up by that scoundrel you call your husband."

He was forced to spring on one side then, for Monica had urged her horse forward, regardless of his presence, and the flash in her eye made him recoil for a moment; but he was wild with

rage, and sprang at her horse, catching him by the bridle.

"You shall hear me!" he cried. "You shall, I say! You have heard his story, now hear mine. He has brought false reports. I know him of old. He is my enemy. He has poisoned others against me before now. Lady Monica, upon my word of honour——"

"*Your honour!*"

That was all. Indeed, there was no more to be said. Even Conrad felt that, and his grasp upon the reins relaxed. Monica was not in the least afraid of him. She looked him steadily over as she moved quietly onward, without the least haste or flurry. Her quiet courage, her lofty scorn of him, stung him to madness.

"Very good, Lady Monica—I beg your

pardon—Lady Trevlyn, I should say now. Very good. We understand each other excellently well. You have made a promise, only to break it—I will show you how a vow *can* be kept. I, too, have made a vow in my time. I make another now. I have vowed to ruin the happiness and prosperity of Randolph Trevlyn's life; now I will do more. I will destroy your peace and happiness also!"

He was following Monica as he spoke, and there was a deep, steady malevolence in every tone of his voice, and in each word that he uttered, which gave something of sinister significance to threats that might well have been mere idle bravado. Monica paid not the slightest heed. She rode on as if she did not even hear; but she wished she had her husband beside her.

She was not afraid for herself, only for him; and in his absence it was easy to be haunted by vague, yet terrible, fears.

But days sped by; news from Germany was good. Randolph's task was accomplished, and he was on his way home; nay, he would be there almost as soon as the letter which announced him. He did not specify exactly how he would come, but he bid her look for him about dusk that very day.

How her heart throbbed with joy! She could not strenuously combat Mrs. Pendrill's determination to return home at once, so that husband and wife should be alone on his return. She wanted Randolph all to herself. She hungered for him; she hardly knew how to wait for the slowly crawling hours to pass.

She drove Mrs. Pendrill to St. Maws, and on her return wandered aimlessly about the great lonely house, saying to herself, in a sort of ceaseless cadence :

" He is coming. He is coming. He is coming."

Dusk was falling in the dim house. The shadows were growing black in the gloomy hall, where Monica was restlessly pacing. The last pale gleam of sunlight flickered and faded as she watched and waited with intense expectancy.

A man's firm step upon the terrace without—a man's tall shadow across the threshold. Monica sprang forward with a low cry.

" Randolph ! "

" Not exactly that, Lady Trevlyn ! "

She stopped short, and threw up her

head like some beautiful wild creature at bay.

"Sir Conrad, how *dare* you! Leave my husband's house this instant! Do you wish him to find you here? Do you wish a second chastisement at his hands?"

Conrad's face flushed crimson, darkening with the intensity of his rage, as he heard those last words.

He had been drinking deeply; his usual caution and cowardice were merged in a passionate desire for revenge at all costs. And what better revenge could he enjoy at that moment than to be surprised by the master of the house upon his return in company with his wife? Monica had asked him if he wished Randolph to find him there—it was just that wish which had brought him.

"Monica!" he cried passionately, "you shall hear me. I will be heard! You shall not judge me till I can plead my own cause. The veriest criminal is heard in his defence."

He advanced a step nearer, but she recoiled before him, and pointed to the door.

"Go, Sir Conrad, unless you wish to be expelled by my servants. I will listen to nothing."

She moved as if to summon assistance, but he sprang forward and seized her hand, holding her wrist in so fierce a grasp that she could neither free herself nor reach the bell. She was a prisoner at his mercy.

But Monica was a true Trevlyn, and a stranger to mere physical fear. The mad-

ness in his gleaming eyes, the ferocity of his whole aspect, were sufficiently alarming. She knew in this vast place that it would be in vain to call for help, no one would hear her voice; but she faced her enemy with cool, inflexible courage, trusting to her own strong will, and the inherent cowardice of a man who could thus insult a woman alone in her husband's house.

"Loose me, Sir Conrad!" she said.

"Not until you have heard me."

"I will not hear you. I know as much of your story as there is any need I should. Loose me, I say! Do you know that my husband will be here immediately? Do you wish *him* to expel you from his house?"

Conrad laughed wildly, a sort of

demoniac laugh, that made her shudder in spite of herself. Was he mad? Yes, mad with drink and with fury — not irresponsible, yet so blind, so crazed, so possessed with thoughts of vengeance, that he was almost more dangerous than a raving maniac would have been. His eyes glowed with sullen fire. His voice was hoarse and strained.

"Do I wish him to find me here? Yes, I do—I do!" he laughed wildly. "Kiss me, Monica—call me your friend again! There is yet time—show him you are not his slave—show him how you assert yourself in his absence."

Monica recoiled with a cry of horror; but the strength of madness was upon him. He held her fast by the wrist. It was unspeakably hideous to be alone

in that dim place with this terrible madman.

"Monica, I love you—you shall—you must be mine!"

Was that another step without? It was —it was! Thank Heaven he had come!

"Randolph! Randolph! Randolph!"

Monica's voice rang out with that sudden piercing clearness that bespeaks terror and distress.

The next moment Conrad was hurled backwards, with a force that sent him staggering against the wall, breathless and powerless. Before he could recover himself he was lifted bodily off his feet, shaken like a rat, and literally thrown down the terrace steps, rolling over and over in the descent, till he lay at the foot stunned, bruised and shaken. He picked himself

slowly up, muttering curses as he limped away. Little were his curses heeded by the two he had left behind.

Monica, white, trembling, unnerved by all she had gone through during the past minutes, held out her arms to her husband.

"Randolph! Oh, Randolph!"

He clasped her close to his heart, and held her there as if he never meant to let her go. He bent his head over her, and she felt his kisses on her cheek. He did not doubt—he did not distrust her! His strong arms pressed her even closer and closer. She lay against his breast, feeling no wish ever to leave that shelter. Oh, he was so true and noble—her own loving, faithful husband! How she loved him she had never known until that supreme moment.

At last she stirred in his arms and lifted her face to his.

"Randolph, you must never leave me again," she said. "I cannot bear it—I cannot."

"I will not, my dear wife," he answered. "Never again shall aught but death part thee and me."

She clung to him, half shuddering.

"Ah! do not talk of death, Randolph. I cannot bear it—I cannot listen."

He pressed a kiss upon her trembling lips.

"Does my wife love me now?" he asked, very gravely and tenderly. "Let me hear it from your own sweet lips, my Monica."

"Ah, Randolph, I love, I love you;" she lifted her eyes to his as she spoke. There

was something almost solemn in their deep, earnest gaze. "Randolph, I do not think any one but your wife could know such a love as mine."

"Not your husband?" he asked, returning her look with one equally full of meaning. "Monica, you may love as well, but I think you cannot love more than I do."

She laid her head down again. It was unspeakably sweet to hear him say so, to feel his arms about her, to know that they were united at last, and that nothing could part them now."

"Not even death," said Monica to herself; "for love like ours is stronger than death."

"How came that scoundrel here?" asked Randolph, somewhat later as they

stood together on the terrace, watching the moonlight on the sea.

"I think he came to frighten me—perhaps to try and hurt us once more by his wicked words and deeds. Randolph, is he mad? He looked so dreadful to-day. He was not the old Conrad I once knew. It was terrible—till you came."

"I believe at times he is mad," answered Randolph, "with a sort of madness that is not actual insanity, though somewhat akin to it. It is the madness of ungovernable passion and hatred that rises up in him from time to time against certain individuals, and becomes, as it seems, a sort of monomania with him. It was so with his friend and benefactor Colonel Hamilton, when once he felt himself found out. Ever since the horsewhipping I

administered to him, I believe he has felt vindictively towards me. Our paths led us wide apart for several years, but as soon as we met again the old enmity rose up once more. He tried to hurt me through my wife." Randolph looked down at her with a proud smile upon his handsome face. "I need not say how utterly and miserably he has failed."

Monica glanced up at him, a world of loving confidence in her eyes; yet the clinging clasp of her hands tightened upon his arm. He fancied she trembled a little.

"What is it, my Monica?"

She pressed a little more closely towards him.

"Randolph, do you think he will try to hurt you now—try to do you some injury?"

The husband smiled re-assuringly at her.

"Hurt me? How, Monica?"

"Oh, I don't know; but he has spoken such cruel, wicked words. He said he had vowed to ruin our happiness—he looked as if he meant it—so vindictive, so terrible!" she shivered a little.

He took her hands, and held them in his warm, strong clasp.

"Are you afraid of what that bad man says, Monica—a man who is a coward and a scoundrel of the deepest dye? Are you afraid of idle threats from his lips? How could he ruin our happiness now?"

She looked up at him, still with a sort of undefined trouble in her eyes.

"He might hurt you, Randolph," she half whispered. "What hurts you, hurts

me. If—if—he were to take you away from me——"

Randolph laid his hand smilingly upon her lips.

"My darling, you are unnerved by the fright he gave you. When was Monica troubled by idle fears before?"

"I don't know what I fear, Randolph; but I have feelings sometimes—premonitions, presentiments, and I cannot shake them off. Ever since Conrad came, I felt a kind of horror of him, even though I tried to call him friend. Sometimes I think it must mean something."

"No doubt it does," answered Randolph. "It is the natural shrinking of your pure soul from his evil, vicious nature. I can well understand it. It could hardly be otherwise. He could not deceive you long."

She looked gravely out before her.

"No, I do not think he really deceived me long—not my innermost self of all. But I was very self-willed. I wanted to judge for myself, and I could not judge him rightly. I believed him. I did not want to be unjust—and he deceived me."

Randolph smiled and laid his hand caressingly upon her shoulder. She looked up with a smile.

"That is right, Monica. You must put away these sad, wistful looks. We must not let this evening's happiness be marred by any doubts and fears. You have your husband again. Is not that enough?"

She turned and laid her head against his shoulder. His arm was fast about her in a moment. She drew a long breath, almost like a sigh.

"Randolph, I think that moments like this must be a foretaste of heaven."

He kissed her, and she added, low and dreamily:

"Only there, there will be no fear of parting. Death could not part us there."

"Death could not sunder our hearts even here, my Monica," said Randolph. "Some love is for eternity."

"Yes," she answered, looking out over the wide sea with a deep smile, that seemed as if it were reading the future in the vast, heaving expanse of moon-lit water. "Our love is like that—not for time alone, but for eternity."

He caught the gravity of her mood. Some subtle sympathy drew them ever closer and more close together.

"And so," he added gravely and ten-

derly, "we need fear nothing; for nothing can alter that one great thing. Nothing can change our love. We belong to one another always—always."

She stood very still and quiet.

"Yes," she said, "for ever and ever. Randolph, if we could both die to-night I think it would be a happy thing for us."

"Why?"

"Because then there would be no parting to fear."

"And now?"

"Now I do fear it. I fear it without knowing why. *He* will part us if he can."

Randolph strained his wife close to his heart.

"*If* he can! Monica, look up; put away these idle fears, my love. Can I not

take care of you and of myself? Let us put him for ever out of our lives."

"Ah! if only we could!" breathed Monica.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH.

A SHADOW.

The days that followed were very full of happiness and peace for Monica and her husband. They were alone together in the dim old castle, far away from the busy whirl of life they had so gladly left behind, free to be with each other every moment of the flying hours, learning to know and to love one another with a more perfect comprehending love with each succeeding day.

Not one tiny cloud of reserve or distrust clouded the sunshine of their horizon. Monica had laid before Randolph that

unlucky letter of Lady Diana's, had listened with a sort of mingling of delight and indignation to his comments on the composition—delight to hear that he had always loved her from the first, that in gratifying her father's desire he had but been gratifying the dearest desire of his own heart—indignation towards the mischief-making relative, who had tried to deceive and humiliate her, who had told her one half of the story and concealed the other.

But indignation was only a momentary feeling. Monica was too happy to cherish resentment. Her anger was but a passing spark.

"I should like to speak my mind to Lady Diana," remarked Randolph, as he tore the paper into small fragments and

tossed them over the cliff. "I always distrusted her wisdom, but I did not look for deliberate malice like that. Why did you not show me that letter when it came, Monica, and let me see what I had to say to it?"

She looked up with a smile.

"Because I was so foolish and distrustful in those days. I did long to once, but then came the thought—Suppose it should be true?"

And then they both smiled. There was a charm and sweetness in thus discussing the past, with the light of the happy present shining upon it.

"But she meant to be your friend, Randolph. We must not forget that. I suppose she thought that you would tell me of your love, but that she ought to

inform me of your generosity. Poor Aunt Diana! we should get on better now. In those days, Randolph, I think I was very *difficile*—very wilful and unapproachable. I used to think it would kill me ever to leave Trevlyn. I think now that it would have been the ruin of me to stay. It is not good to grow up in one narrow groove, and to gain no knowledge of anything beyond."

"That is quite true, Monica. Does that mean that you will be willing to leave Trevlyn, by and-bye?"

"I shall be willing to do anything that you wish, Randolph. You know I would go anywhere with you. Do you want to take me away again?"

"Presently I think I do. I should like to take you to Scotland in August, to stay

a month or two at my little shooting-box there. You would like the free, roving life you could lead there, amongst that world of heather. And then there are things to be done at Trevlyn. Monica, will you be able to reconcile yourself to changes here?"

"Changes?"

"Yes. I should like to see Trevlyn restored to what it must have been a century ago. The glory has departed of late years, but you have only to look round to see what the place must have been once. I want to restore that faded glory—not to introduce glaring changes, but to make it something like what it must have been when our ancestors lived there long years ago. Would you like that, Monica? It would not go against you, would it, to see

Trevlyn look so? I want it to be worthy of the mistress who will preside there. It is a wish that has haunted me ever since I entered its precincts and met you there."

Monica was glad to enter into any plan proposed by her husband. She was willing he should restore Trevlyn in any way that he wished; but she preferred that he should make his own arrangements about it, and let her only judge by the result. She could not yet enter with any sense of realisation into projects for making Trevlyn other than she had known it all her life; but she trusted Randolph's taste and judgment, and let him plan and settle everything as he would.

She was ready to leave home whenever he wished it, the more so that Conrad

Fitzgerald still occupied a suite of rooms in his half dismantled house, and hung about the neighbourhood in an odd, aimless sort of fashion.

How he spent his time no one seemed to know, but he must have developed roving tendencies, for Monica was constantly seeing him in unexpected places, down by the rocky shore, wandering over the trackless downs, or crouching in the heather or behind a tree, as she and her husband passed along in their daily walks or rides.

He never met them face to face. He appeared to endeavour always to keep out of sight. Randolph, as a matter of fact, seldom saw him, and paid no heed, when he did, to the vindictive scowl upon the yet beautiful face. But Monica seemed

haunted by this persistent watching and waiting. She was ever on the look-out for the crouching figure in some place of concealment, for the glitter of the fierce blue eyes, and the cruel sneer of the pale lips. She felt intensely nervous and timid beneath that sense of *espionage;* and she was glad when August came, and she was to leave Trevlyn and its spectre behind.

Accounts from Germany were very good. Arthur wrote little pencil notes every week, informing Monica that he was getting on "like a house on fire," and singing the praises of Tom, who had stayed so long with him, "like the good fellow he was," and would have remained longer only it really wasn't worth while.

"I'm afraid I've been very unjust to

Tom," said Monica. "I want to tell him so when he comes back. May we wait till he does? I want to hear all about Arthur at first hand, as I may not go to see him yet."

So they waited for the return of the traveller.

Monica did sincerely wish to hear about Arthur, but she had something else to report to Tom as well. She had the greatest confidence in his acuteness and penetration, and could sometimes say to him what she would have despaired of communicating intelligibly to any one else.

There was no difficulty in securing a private interview when once he had come back. Every one knew how anxious Monica would be to hear every detail of Arthur's present life, and Tom resigned

himself, and told his tale with all possible fulness and accuracy.

Monica listened with an absorbed look upon her face. When he had told all, she said simply:

"Thank you, Tom, for all your goodness to him. I am very sorry I ever misunderstood you, and said such hard things of and to you. You have got the best of it in the end, by heaping coals of fire upon me."

He smiled slightly.

"My dear Monica, you don't suppose I troubled my head over your ladyship's righteous wrath. I found it very amusing, I assure you."

"I believe you did," assented Monica, smiling in turn; "which made things a little trying for me. Tom, I believe you

have always been my friend, even when we have seemed most bitterly opposed."

The sudden earnestness of her manner made him look at her keenly, and he spoke without his usual half-mocking intonation.

"I hope so, Monica. I wish to have the right to call myself your friend."

He looked steadily at her, knowing there was more to follow. She was silent for a time, and then came a sudden and most unexpected question, and one apparently most irrelevant.

"Do you know Sir Conrad Fitzgerald?"

"I used to know him when he was a child. I knew him slightly at Oxford. He has made no attempt to renew the acquaintance since he has been down here; and, judging by what I have heard, I

should not be inclined to encourage him if he did."

"But there would be nothing extraordinary in your visiting him?"

"Possibly not; but I cannot say I have any wish to try the experiment."

"You know his history, perhaps?—the dark stain."

"I heard of it at the time it happened—not from Trevlyn, though. It's a sort of story that doesn't make one yearn to renew acquaintance with the hero."

For a few moments Monica sat very still and silent. Then she asked quietly:

"Do you think he is the kind of man to be dangerous?"

"Dangerous?"

"Yes—if he had taken a vow of vengeance. Do you think——?"

"Well, what?"

"Think he would try very hard to accomplish such a vow? Do people never in these days try to do an injury to a man they hate?"

Tom began to understand her now.

"Well, one cannot lay down hard and fast lines; but it is not now customary for a man to attempt the sort of vengeance that he would have done a century or so back. He tries in these days to hurt an enemy morally by injuring his reputation; and I think no one need stand in much awe of Fitzgerald, least of all a man like your husband. It is necessary to possess a reputation of one's own to undermine that of another with much success. Fitzgerald certainly has a reputation, but not the kind that makes him dangerous as an enemy."

Monica heard this dictum in silence. She did not appear much relieved, and he saw it.

"Now you anticipate," he continued, quite quietly and unemotionally, "that he will make a regular attack upon Trevlyn one of these days?"

"I am afraid so sometimes," answered Monica. "It may be very foolish; but I am afraid. He always seems watching us. Hardly a day goes by but I see him, with such an evil look in his eye. Tom, I sometimes think that he is going mad."

The young man's face changed slightly.

"That, of course, would put a new colour on the matter. Have you any reasons upon which to base your suspicions?"

"Nothing that you would perhaps call reasons, but they make me suspicious.

Randolph spoke of a touch of insanity that he had fancied lurked in his brain. At least, when he hates he seems to hate with a ferocity that suggests the idea of madness. Tom, if you were to see him, should you know ?"

Tom mused a little.

"I might be able to hazard a shrewd guess, perhaps. Why do you want so much to know ?"

Without answering, Monica propounded another question. "If he were mad, he would be much more dangerous, would he not ?"

"Yes ; and if really dangerous, could be placed under proper control."

A look of relief crossed Monica's face.

"Could that be done ?"

"Certainly, if absolute madness could be

proved. But you know in many cases this is most difficult to demonstrate; and in Fitzgerald's independent position it might be exceedingly hard to get the needful evidence."

Her face clouded again.

"But you will see him, Tom? You will try to find out?"

He hesitated a little. To tell the truth he did not care about the job. He had a hearty contempt for the man himself, did not attach much weight to Monica's suspicions, and thought her fears far-fetched. But her pleading face prevailed.

"Well, Monica, if you particularly wish it, I will endeavour to meet him, and enter into a sort of speaking acquaintance. I don't promise to force myself upon him if he avoids me pointedly, but I

will do what I can in a casual sort of way to find out something about him. But it is not at all likely he will prove mad enough to be placed under restraint."

"I believe he drinks," said Monica, softly. "He used not to, but I believe he does now."

"Well, if he has a screw loose and drinks as well, he may make an end of himself in time. At any rate, if it will relieve your mind, I will find out what I can about him."

"Thank you, Tom; I am very much obliged to you; and if you cannot do much, at least you can keep your eye upon him, and let me know how long he stays here. I—I—it may be very foolish; but I don't want Randolph to come back till he has gone."

Tom's eyebrows went up.

"Then you really are afraid?"

She smiled faintly.

"I believe I am."

"Well, it sounds very absurd; but I have a sort of a faith in your premonitions. Anyway, I will keep your words in mind, and do what I can; and we will try and get him off the field before you are ready to return to it. I should not think the attractions of the place will hold him long."

So Monica went off to Scotland with a lightened heart; and yet the shadow of the haunting fear did not vanish entirely even in the sunshine of her great happiness.

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH.

IN SCOTLAND.

"An empty sky and a world of heather."

Such was the scene that met Monica's eye as she stepped out into the clear morning sunshine, and gazed out over the wide expanse of moorland that lay in a kind of purple glory all around her.

Randolph's shooting-box was situated in a very lonely, yet wonderfully picturesque spot. It seemed as if it had just been dropped down upon its little craggy eminence amid this rolling sea of billowy heather, and had anchored itself

there without more ado. There was no attempt at park or garden, or enclosed ground of any kind. The moor itself was park and garden in one, and the heather and gorse grew right up to the wide terrace walk upon which the south windows of the little house opened. A plantation of pine and fir behind gave protection from the winter winds, and shade from the summer sun; but save for this little wood—an oasis in a blooming desert — the moor stretched away in its wild freedom on every hand, the white road alone, glimpses of which could be seen here and there, seeming to connect it with the great world beyond.

Trevlyn was lonely and isolated enough, but it almost seemed to Monica, as she gazed over the sunny moorland that

glorious summer morning, as if she had never been so utterly remote from the abode of man as she was to-day.

There was a step behind her, and a hand was laid upon her shoulder.

"Well, Monica?"

She turned to him with lips that quivered as they smiled.

"It is all so exquisite, Randolph—so perfect. You did not tell me half."

"You like it, my Monica?"

"Like it! It seems as if you and I were just alone in the world together." He bent his head and touched her brow with his lips.

"And that contents you, Monica?"

She looked up with eloquent eyes.

"Need you ask that question now?"

His smile expressed an unspeakable

happiness; he put his arm about her saying softly:

"There are some questions one never tires of hearing answered, sweet wife. Ah, Monica! when I think of the past, I feel as if it were almost necessary to have lived through that, to know what such happiness as ours can be. It is the former doubt that makes the present certainty so unutterably sweet. Do you ever feel that yourself, my darling?"

He spoke gravely and gently, as they stood together in the golden sunshine. She looked up into his face with deep love and reverence, yet he felt her slight form quiver in his clasp. He looked at her smilingly.

"What is it, Monica?"

"Nothing—only a strange feeling I have

sometimes. I know what you mean, Randolph. You are quite, quite right—only do not let us to-day think of the sorrow that went before. Let us be happy with one another."

"We will, my Monica. You are quite right. This is our bridal holiday, of which circumstances cheated us at the outset, and as such we will enjoy it. Come in to breakfast now; and then we will have the horses out, and you and I will explore our new world together, and forget there is any other before or behind us."

The shadow fled from Monica's brow, the happy light came back to her eyes, came back and took up its abode there as if never to depart again. What happy, happy days were those that followed! No one invaded the solitude which was such

bliss to the two who had sought it; no foot crossed the threshold of the peaceful home that Randolph had made ready with such care for the reception of his bride.

And yet, as everything must end at last, pleasure as well as pain, joy as well as sorrow, a day came at last when it was needful to leave this happy seclusion, and mingle once again with the busier stream of life that flowed onwards, ever onwards, outside the walls of their retreat.

Engagements had been made before, pledges given to various friends that visits should be paid during that period so dear to the heart of man, "the shooting season." Little enough did Randolph care for sport in his present mood; far rather would he have spent longer time alone with his wife in happy isolation; but his friends became

urgent, letters persecuted them with increased vehemence, and Monica, casting away her first reluctance, roused herself to say at last that she thought they ought to go.

"We shall be together still, Randolph," she said, with a little laugh. "It is not as if we should not have one another. No one can separate us now, and we ought to be able to be happy anywhere together."

And yet, when the time came, it was very hard to go. Randolph came upon Monica the last evening at sunset, watching the glorious pageantry of the sky, with something of the old wistfulness upon her face.

"You are sorry to be leaving then, Monica?"

She started, and turned to him, almost as if for protection.

"Yes, I am sorry. We have been so very, very happy here. Randolph, is it very foolish? Sometimes I feel as if such happiness were too great for this world—as if it *could* not go on always so. It seems almost too beautiful, too perfect. Do you ever feel the same?"

"I know what you mean, sweet wife. Yet I am not afraid of our happiness or of the future. It is love that brings the brightness with it, and I think nothing now can change our love."

"Ah, no, no!" she cried impetuously; "nothing can change that. You always understand. Randolph, you are so strong, so good, so patient. Ah! what should I do without you now?"

"You have not got to do without me, Monica. A husband cannot be set aside by anyone or anything. You must not let nervous fears get the better of you. Tell me, is anything troubling you to-night?"

"No, no; only that the old feeling will sometimes come back. It is foolish, I know; but I cannot quite rid myself of it."

"The old feeling?"

"Yes, that some trouble is coming upon me—upon us. I cannot explain; but I feel it sometimes—I feel as if it were coming nearer."

He did not laugh at her fears. He only said very gently and tenderly:

"I pray God, my sweet wife, that trouble may be very far away from you; yet if it comes, I know it will be bravely,

nobly borne, and that the furnace of sorrow will only bring out the gold more bright and pure than ever."

She glanced at him, and then over the purple moorlands and into the glorious western sky. A look of deep, settled purpose shone out of her eyes, and her face grew calm and resolute. She thought of that moment often in days to come, and of her husband's words. It was a recollection always fraught with much of strengthening comfort.

The round of inevitable visits to be paid proved less irksome than Monica had anticipated.

Randolph's friends were pleasant, well-bred people, with whom it was easy to get on, and to make things more easy for Monica, Beatrice Wentworth and her

brother were not unfrequently numbered among the house party they were invited to meet.

Both the young earl and his sister were devoted to Monica, and their presence added much to her enjoyment of the different visits that they paid together. Lord Haddon was her constant attendant whenever her husband could not be with her, and his frank, boyish homage was accepted in the spirit in which it was offered. Monica, though much admired and liked, was not "popular" in the ordinary sense of the term. She did not attract round her a crowd of amused admirers, as Beatrice did, and most young men, however much they might admire her stately beauty, found her somewhat difficult to get on with. With elderly people she was more at ease, and a

great favourite from her gentleness and peculiar refinement of thought and manner; but for the most part, during the gay doings of the day, she was left to the attendance of Randolph or Haddon, and no arrangement could have been more to her own liking.

Yet one trifling incident occurred to disturb her peace of mind, although she thought she possibly dwelt upon it more than the circumstance warranted.

She was at a large luncheon party, to which her hostess and guests had alike been invited to meet many other parties from surrounding houses.

A grand battue in the park had drawn away most of the sportsmen, and the ladies were lunching almost by themselves. Monica's surprise was somewhat great to

find in her right-hand neighbour none other than Cecilia Bellamy, with whom her last interview had been anything but agreeable.

Mrs. Bellamy, however, seemed to have forgotten all about that.

"It is really you, Monica. I hoped I should meet you somewhere; I heard you were staying about; I know I've behaved badly. I ought to have written to you when your father died. I was awfully sorry, I was indeed. We were always fond of the earl, Conrad and I. He was so good to us when we were children. It was horrid of me not to write, but I never do know how to write a letter of condolence. I hope you're not very angry with me."

"Indeed, no," answered Monica. "Indeed, I never thought about it."

"I knew you wouldn't care to hear from me," pursued the lively little woman. "I didn't behave nicely to you, Monica, and I'm sorry now I listened to Conrad's persuasions; but I'm so easy-going, and thought it all fun. I'm sorry now. I really am, for I've got shaken in my confidence in Master Conrad. I believe he'll go to the dogs still, for all his professions. By-the-bye, did you ever see him after you got back to Trevlyn?"

"Once or twice. I believe he was living in his house down there."

"That dreadful old barn! I can't think how he can exist there. He will take to drink, and go mad, I do believe, if he stays six months in such a place. Monica, I don't want to frighten you—I may be silly to think such a thing,

but I can't believe he's after any good there."

Monica shivered a little instinctively.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't quite know what I do mean. If you weren't such an old friend, of course I couldn't say a word; but you know perhaps that there's something rather odd sometimes about Conrad."

"Odd?"

"Yes—I know he's bad enough; but it's when he has his odd fits on that he's worse. I don't believe he is always altogether responsible. He's given way, and now he can't always help himself, I do think. He isn't mad, of course, but he can be very wild at times," and she glanced at her companion with something of significance.

"Why do you say all this to me?"

asked Monica, with a sort of apprehension.

Mrs. Bellamy laughed a little.

"Why, can't you see? Don't you know how he hates your husband?"

Monica's face blanched a little.

"But you don't mean——"

"No, no, of course not," with a short laugh that had little of mirth in it. "I don't mean anything—only I think, if ever Conrad is lurking about in his wild moods, that Lord Trevlyn had better keep a sharp look out. Your woods and cliffs are nasty lonely places, and it's always well to be on the safe side."

Monica sat pale and silent; Mrs. Bellamy laughed again in that half uneasy way.

"Now, don't look like that, and keep

your own counsel. I'm a silly woman, as you know, and nobody minds what I say, but I can't be quite comfortable without just warning you. For mischief is sometimes done in a moment between two angry men that never can be undone so long as the world lasts. Now don't go and get frightened, Monica—it may be all a ridiculous fancy; but just keep your eyes open."

"Thank you, Cecilia," said Monica quietly. "I will."

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH.

A VISIT TO ARTHUR.

"ARE you getting tired of this sort of thing, Monica?" asked Randolph, about three days later.

He had fancied he detected traces of weariness at times—weariness or anxiety: he could hardly have told which—in the lines of her face; and he thought that possibly some trouble was resting upon her. He was very quick to note the least change in one he loved so well.

Her smile, however, was very reassuring.

"I think I should never be really tired

of any life you shared, Randolph; but I like being alone together best."

"I, too," he responded, with great sincerity. "Monica, as we have done our duty by society now, shall we indulge ourselves once more, and leave the world to wag on its own way, and forget it again for a few more happy weeks?"

Her face was bright and eager.

"Go back to the moorland shooting-box, Randolph?" she questioned.

"No; not that quite. The season is getting a little late for remaining up in the north. I have a better plan in my head for you."

"Are we going back to Trevlyn, then?"

"Trevlyn is not ready for us; it will be some time before it is. Can you think

of nothing else you would like to do?—of nobody you want to see?"

A flush rose suddenly into Monica's face: her eyes shone with happiness.

"Oh, Randolph! are you going to take me to see Arthur?"

"You would like to go?"

"Above everything."

"Then the thing is done. We will start next week. I talked about it to the doctor when I saw him, and he advised three months of entire quiet and seclusion whilst he settled down to the new life. After that, he believed there would be no reason at all against his seeing friends from home. I wrote again last week to put the question definitely, and the answer is entirely satisfactory. If you want to go, Monica, the whole question is settled."

She came close up to him, clasping her hands upon his shoulder, and looking up with loving gratitude and delight.

"You think of everything, Randolph. You are so good to me. It is just the one thing to make my happiness complete: to see my boy again, and make sure with my own eyes that he is well cared for and content with his life. I want to be able to picture him where he is. I want to hear him say that he is happy: that he does not pine after Trevlyn."

"I think you will have your wish, then, Monica, for, from what I can gather, he is very well pleased with his quarters, and improved health makes life pleasant and full of zest. He has the natural love of change that you never knew, and your inherited love for your old home is not

really shared by him to any great extent now that he has tried another life. Trevlyn is not woven into the very fibres of his heart as into yours. I think the homesickness passed off quickly with him."

"Yes, I daresay. I believe I was foolish myself about Trevlyn, and taught him to be foolish too. Why is it that the younger we are, and the less we know, the more we are convinced we are always right? I have made so many, many mistakes. Once I thought you did not love me, Randolph."

It was sweet to him still to hear her speak thus, with the intonation that always thrilled him through—with the look upon her face so much more eloquent than any words. It was sweet to feel her loving confidence and dependence. Again

and again he vowed deep down in his heart that she should never know a trouble from which he could save her.

The journey was approved by both. It would take them away once again from the round of social duties and pleasures—of which for the time being they had had enough—and leave them practically alone together, to be all in all to one another, as was now their greatest happiness.

"It is too bad of you to run away, Monica," Beatrice grumbled, when she heard the news. "Your brother can't want you more than we do here. And if you go, you'll vanish no one knows for how long, as you did before, and then you will go and bury yourselves in your enchanted castle right away by the sea, and nobody will hear of you any more. I call

it too bad: just as we were getting to be friends and learning to know you."

Monica smiled at the imputation of vanishing so entirely.

"You shall hear of us sometimes, I promise you," she answered. "If you and your brother will not find the 'enchanted castle' too dull, I hope you will come and see us there when we go back in the autumn. There are not a great many attractions, I am afraid, but there is some shooting and hunting. I should like to show you Trevlyn some day, Beatrice, though I believe it will be a good deal changed from the place I have sometimes described to you."

"It is sure to be perfect, whatever it is like," was the quick response. "I should think we would come—Haddon and I—

if ever we get an invitation. I always did long to see Trevlyn, and I am sure he does the same, though he is no hand at pretty speeches, poor old boy! "

Haddon smiled, and coloured a little; but answered frankly enough.

"Lady Trevlyn does not want pretty speeches, as you call it, made to her, Beatrice. She knows quite well what a pleasure it would be to visit her and Randolph at Trevlyn."

"I should like my husband's oldest friends to see the place," she answered, smiling. "So we will call that matter settled when we really do get home; though I do not quite know when that will be."

Next day Randolph and Monica said good-bye to Scotland, and began their

journey southward. They were in no great haste, and travelled by easy stages. Arthur was to be told nothing of the prospective visit, which was to be kept as a surprise till the last moment. Monica was never a very good correspondent, even where Arthur was concerned, and if she posted a letter to him, last thing before leaving England, he would not be surprised at a silence of a fortnight or more, by which time at latest she would be with him.

So they took their time over their journey, and the strangeness of all she saw possessed a curious charm for Monica, when viewed beneath her husband's protecting care, and in his constant company. He took her to a few quaint Norman towns, with their fine old churches and picturesque streets and market-places; then to

Paris, where a few days were passed in seeing the sights, and watching the vivid, hurrying, glittering life of that gay capital.

Steering an erratic course, turning this way and that to visit any place of interest, or any romantic spot that Randolph thought would please his wife, they approached their destination, and presently reached the pretty, picturesque little town, hardly more than a village, which was only just rising to importance, on account of the value of its mineral springs lately discovered.

One good-sized hotel and the doctor's establishment, both of which stood at the same end of the village, and a little distance from it, testified to the rising importance of the place. Randolph had secured com-

fortable rooms in the former, where they arrived late one evening.

Monica liked the place; it was not in the least like what she had pictured, far more pretty, more primitive, and more country-like. Wooded hills, surrounded the valley in which it lay. A broad rapid stream ran through it, spanned by more than one grey stone bridge, and the irregularly-built village was quite a picture in its way, with its quaint old houses, with their carved gables and little wooden balconies, and the spire of its church rising above the surrounding trees. Viewed by moonlight, as she saw it first, it was a charming little place; and the charm did not vanish with the more prosaic light of day.

The interview with the doctor was most

satisfactory. He was a kindly, simple-minded man, much interested in his patient from a professional standpoint, and fond of the lad for his own sake. Monica's beauty and sweetness were evidently not lost upon him. He had heard much of her from the young Herr, he explained, and could understand well the feelings he had so often heard expressed.

No, the invalid had not been told of the expected arrival. He did not know but that Lord and Lady Trevlyn were in England. Did the noble lady wish to go to him? He would honour himself by leading the way.

Monica followed him with a beating heart. They went up a wide carpetless staircase, and on the first landing her guide paused, and indicated a certain door.

"He is up; madame can go straight in. A joyful surprise will but do him good."

Monica turned the handle, and entered, as quietly and calmly as if this had been the daily visit to the old room at Trevlyn. Arthur was lying with his back to the door. He was reading, and did not turn his head, fancying it was the servant entering, as he heard the rustle of a dress.

Monica came and stood behind him, laying her hand upon his head.

"Arthur!" she said softly.

Then he started as if he had been shot.

He sat up with an energy that showed a decided increase of strength, holding out his hands in eager welcome.

"Monica! Monica!" he cried, in a sort of rapturous excitement. "It is Monica herself!"

She bent over him and kissed him again and again, and would have made him lie down again; but he was too excited to obey.

"Monica! My own Monica! When did you come? What does it all mean? Oh, this is too splendid! Where's Randolph?"

"Here," answered that familiar voice, just within the door. "Well, my boy, how are you getting on? Like a house on fire, eh? Monica and I are on our wedding trip, you know. We thought we would finish it off by coming to have a look at you. Well, you look pretty comfortable up here, and have made fine progress, I hear, since I saw you last. Like everything as much as you make out in your letters, eh?"

"Oh! I'm all right enough. Never

mind me. Tell me about yourselves. Whose idea was this? I call it just splendid!"

"Randolph's idea," answered Monica. "All the good ideas are his now, Arthur. We have come to stay a whole fortnight with you; and when I have seen everything with my own eyes, and am quite convinced that everybody is treating you well, I shall go home content to Trevlyn, to wait till you can join us there."

"I mustn't think of that just yet," answered Arthur, cheerfully. "My old doctor says it will be a year—perhaps two—before I shall really be on my legs again; but he is quite sure he is going to cure me, which is all that matters. I am awfully comfortable here, and there are some jolly little children of his, who come and amuse

me by the hour together. Oh, yes! I have capital times. I couldn't be more comfortable anywhere; and if you and Randolph come sometimes to see me, I shall have nothing left to wish for."

Certainly Arthur was surrounded by every luxury that wealth could bestow. There was none of the foreign bareness about his rooms that characterised its other apartments. Randolph had ordered everything that could possibly add to his comfort, and make things home-like for him, even to the open fire-place, with its cheerful fire of logs, although the stove still retained its place, and in cold weather did valuable service in keeping an even temperature in the room.

Arthur's visitors had made him gradually understand how much more sumptuously

he was lodged than other patients, and he well knew to whom he owed the luxuries he enjoyed. He explained all this to Monica, and in her own sweet way she thanked her husband for his tenderness towards her boy.

"I always feel as if Arthur were a sort of link between us, Monica," he said. "I am sure he was in those old days, when we were strangers to each other. I owe him a great deal that he knows nothing about. Were it only for that, I must always love him, and feel towards him as towards a brother."

Quickly and happily the days slipped by and the pleasant visit drew to its close. It lengthened out into nearly three weeks; but at last the news came that Trevlyn was ready for its master and mistress, and

Arthur bid a brave farewell to those who had done so much for him, and settled himself with cheerful readiness to his winter with his new friends. A visit next spring and summer was confidently promised, and he saw his guest go with an unselfish brightness that was in no way assumed.

Monica was quite happy about him now, and, though the parting was a little hard, she was as brave as he. She turned her face homeward with a light heart. Only one little cloud of anxiety lay upon her heart. "What was Conrad Fitzgerald doing? Was he still lurking about Trevlyn?"

Even that question was destined to be answered in a satisfactory manner before many days had passed.

They travelled rapidly homewards, as

the season was advancing, and they were anxious to be once more at Trevlyn.

They were in a train, which had stopped at some station, when another train from an opposite direction steamed up and also stopped. Monica, leaning back in her corner seat, noticed nothing for a time, but was roused to the consciousness that she was being intently regarded by a passenger in the opposite train, whose face was pressed close against the glass.

For some seconds she resisted the impulse to look; but as she felt the glance withdrawn, she presently turned her eyes in the direction of the half-seen face, and then she started violently.

Conrad Fitzgerald, his face pale and sharp, wearing a frightfully malevolent expression, was gazing, or rather glaring,

at her husband, with eyes like those of a wild beast, in their fiery, hungry hate.

Randolph, seated opposite her, reading the paper, was perfectly unconscious of the proximity of his foe; but Monica recoiled with a feeling of horror she could hardly have explained.

The next moment the train had moved on. At least, it was some comfort to know that they were being rapidly carried in opposite directions. Yet it was long before she could forget the vindictive hatred of the gaze she had seen directed towards her husband.

Would Conrad Fitzgerald ever do him the deadly injury he had vowed?

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

BACK AT TREVLYN.

"RANDOLPH! Can this really be Trevlyn?"

The young countess stood in all her radiant loveliness upon the threshold of her old home, and turned her happy face towards the husband who stood beside her, watching with a smile in his eyes for the effect to be produced by his labour of love

"Can this really be Trevlyn?"

"You seemed destined never to know your old home again when you have been banished from it, Monica," he answered,

smiling. "Well, is it as much changed as you expected?"

"It is perfect," said Monica simply; adding, after another long look round her: "If only my father could have seen this—could have lived to witness the realisation of his dream!"

But he would not let her indulge one sad thought that should cloud the brightness of this happy home-coming. He kissed her gently in token of his sympathy, and then drew her towards the blazing fire, whose dancing flames were illuminating the great hall.

"Does it realise your dream, too, my Monica?" he asked softly.

She looked up in his face, deep feeling welling up in the glance of her soft dark eyes.

"To be with you is my dream, Randolph. That is enough for me."

He saw that she was moved, and knew that the associations of Trevlyn, the old home, were crowding upon her. Without speaking, he led her towards a door, which in old days led to a room vast and empty, save for the odds and ends of lumber that gradually accumulated there. Monica glanced up in a sort of surprise as he turned the handle. Why was he taking her there?

She paused on the threshold, and looked about her in mute amaze.

The floor was of polished parquetrie work; the panelled walls, quaintly and curiously carved, shone with the care that had been bestowed upon them; the vaulted roof had been carefully restored

and was a fine specimen of mediæval skill and beauty. The mullioned window to the west had been filled with rich stained glass, that gave back a dusky glimmer through its tinted panes, though the daylight was failing fast. Near to the window stood the one great feature of the room, an organ, which Monica's eyes saw at once was a particularly fine and perfect instrument. An organ of her very own! It was just like Randolph to think of it! She gave him one sweet glance of gratitude, and went up to it in the dim, dusky twilight.

"How good you are to me!" she said softly.

He heard the little quiver in her voice, and bent his head to kiss her; but he spoke in a lighter tone.

"Do you like it? I am so glad! I

thought your home ought not to be without its music-room. See, Monica, your organ will be a sort of friend to whom you can confide all your secrets; for you want nobody to blow it for you. You can set the bellows at work by just turning this handle, and nobody need disturb your solitude when you want to be alone."

She looked up gratefully. He never forgot anything—not even her old love for solitude.

"I never want to be alone now, Randolph," she said. "I always want you."

"And you generally have me, sweet wife. I think we have hardly been separated for more than a few hours at a time since that happy, happy day that made you really mine"

"I want it always to be like that," said Monica, dreamily; "always like that."

He looked at her, and carried the hand that he held to his lips.

"Will you play, Monica?"

She sat down and struck a few dreamy chords, gradually leading up to the theme that was in her mind. Randolph leaned against the mullioned window-frame and watched her. He could see, even in the darkness, the pure, pale outline of her perfect profile, and the crown of her golden hair that framed her face like an aureole.

"Another dream realised, Monica," he said softly, as she turned to him at length.

"What dream, Randolph?"

"A dream that came to me once, in the little cliff church where we were married,

as I watched you—little as you knew it—sitting at the organ, and playing to yourself, one sunny afternoon. But this is better than any dream of pictured saint or spirit—my Monica, my own true wife."

She looked up at him, and came and put her arms about his neck—an unusual demonstration, even now, for her, and they stood very close together in the gathering darkness that was not dark to them.

Monica paid an early visit to St. Maws to see her friends, and to confide to Mrs. Pendrill a little of the wonderful happiness that had flooded her life with sunshine. Then, too, she wanted to see Tom, and to ask him the result of the mission he had half promised to undertake. So far she had learned nothing save that Fitzgerald

had not been seen near Trevlyn for many weeks, and was supposed to have gone abroad.

"Did you see him, Tom?" she asked, when she had found the opportunity she desired.

"Yes, once or twice. I had a good look at him. I should not call him exactly mad, though in a decidedly peculiar mental state. We merely met, as it were, by chance, and talked on indifferent subjects for the most part. Once he asked me, in a sort of veiled way, for professional advice, describing certain unpleasant symptoms and sensations. I advised him to give up the use of spirits, and to try what travelling would do for him. He seemed to think he would take my advice, and shortly afterwards he disappeared from the neigh-

bourhood ; but where he has gone I do not know."

Monica knew that this advice had been followed. "He may go anywhere he likes, if he will only keep away from here," she said. "I am very much obliged to you, Tom, for doing as I asked."

"Pray don't mention it."

"I must mention it, because it was very good of you. Tom, will you come and stay at Trevlyn next week? We have one or two people coming for the pheasants, and we want you to make one of the party, if you will."

"Oh, very well; anything to please. I have had no shooting worth speaking of so far. I should like a week's holiday very well."

So that matter was speedily and easily arranged.

Tom did not ask who were the guests he was to meet, and Monica did not think of naming such entire strangers, Lord Haddon and Lady Beatrice Wentworth. She forgot that Tom and the young earl had met once before on a different occasion.

Those two were to be the first guests. Perhaps later on they would ask more, but Monica was too entirely happy in her present life to wish it in any way disturbed, and Randolph by no means cared to be obliged to give up to guests those happy hours that heretofore he had always spent with Monica. But Beatrice and her brother had already been invited. They were his oldest friends, and were Monica's friends too. She was glad to welcome them to her old home, and the rapturous admiration that its beauties elicited would

have satisfied a more exacting nature than hers.

Beatrice was, as usual, radiant, bewitching, delightful. Monica wished that Tom had come in time to see her arrival, and listen to her sparkling flow of talk. Tom professed to be a woman-hater, or next door to it, but she thought that even he would have to make an exception in favour of Lady Beatrice Wentworth.

She went upstairs with her guest to her room at length, when Beatrice suddenly turned towards her, with quite a new expression upon her face.

"Monica," she said, looking straight into her eyes, "you are changed—you are different from what you were in London —different even from what you were in Scotland, though I saw a change then. I

don't know how to express it, but you are beautified—glorified. What is it? What has changed you since I first knew you?"

Monica knew right well; but some feelings could not be translated into words.

"I am very happy," she said, quietly. "If there is any change, that must be the cause."

"Happier than you have ever been before?"

"Yes; I think every week makes me happier. I learn to know my husband better and better, you see."

A sudden wistful sadness flashed into the eyes so steadily regarding her. Monica saw it before it had been blotted out by the arch drollery of the look that immediately succeeded.

"And it does not wear off, Monica? Sometimes it does, you know—after a time. Will it ever, in your case, do you think?"

"I think not," she answered.

"And I think not, too," answered Beatrice. "Ah me! How happy some people are!"

She laughed, but there was something of bitterness in the tone. Monica looked at her seriously.

"Are you not happy, Beatrice?"

The girl's audacious smile beamed out over her face.

"Don't I look so?"

"Sometimes—not always."

"One must have variety before all things, you know," was the gay answer. "It would never do to be always in the

same style—it lacks piquancy after a time. Now let me have time to beautify myself in harmony with this most charming of old places, and come back for me when you are dressed; I feel as if I should lose my way, or see bogies in these delightful corridors and staircases."

And Monica left her guest as desired, coming back, half an hour later, to find her transformed into the semblance of some pictured dame of a century or two gone by, in stiff amber brocade, quaintly cut about the neck and sleeves, and relieved here and there by dazzling scarlet blossoms. Beatrice never at any time looked like anybody else, but to-night she was particularly, strikingly original.

"Ah, you black-robed queen, you will just do as a foil for me!" was the greeting

Monica received. "Whenever I see you in any garb, no matter what it is, I always think it is just one that suits you best of everything. Are you having a dinner-party to-night?"

"Not exactly. A few men are coming, who have asked Randolph to shoot since we came back. You and I are the only ladies."

And then they went down to the empty drawing-room a good half-hour before any one else was likely to appear.

Beatrice chatted away very brightly. She seemed in gay spirits, and had a great deal to tell of what had passed since their farewell in Scotland a month or two ago.

She moved about the drawing-room, examining the various treasures it contained, and admiring the beauty of the

pictures. She was standing half concealed by the curtains draping a recessed window, when the door opened, admitting Tom Pendrill. He was in dinner dress, having arrived about an hour previously.

"You have come then, Tom," said Monica. "I am glad. I was afraid you meant to desert us after all."

"The wish being father to the thought, I presume," answered Tom, shaking hands. "By-the-bye, here is a letter from Arthur's doctor I've brought to show you. He gives a capital account of his patient. Can you read German writing, or shall I construe? He writes about as crabbedly as——"

And here Tom stopped short, seeing that Monica was not alone.

"I beg your pardon," he added, drawing

himself up with a ceremoniousness quite unusual with him.

"Not at all," answered Monica, quietly. "Let me introduce you to Lady Beatrice Wentworth—Mr. Tom Pendrill."

They exchanged bows very distantly. Monica became suddenly aware, in some subtle, inexplicable fashion, that these two were not strangers to one another—that this was not their first meeting. Moreover, it appeared as if their former acquaintance, such as it was, could have been by no means agreeable to either, for it was easy to see that a sort of covert antagonism existed between them which neither of them took over much pains to conceal.

Tom's face assumed its most sharply cynical expression, as he drew at once into

his hardest shell of distant reserve and sarcastic politeness.

Beatrice opened her feather fan, and wielded it with a sort of aggressive negligence. She dropped into a seat beside Monica, and began to talk to her with an air of studied affectation utterly at variance with her ordinary manner, ignoring Tom as entirely as if no introduction had passed between them, and that with an assumption of hauteur that could only be explained by a deeply-seated antipathy.

Monica tried to include Tom in the conversation; but he declined to be included, returned an indifferent answer, and withdrew to a distant corner of the room, where he remained deeply engrossed, as it seemed, in the study of a photographic album.

Monica was perplexed. She could not imagine what it all meant. She had never heard the Pendrills speak of Lady Beatrice Wentworth, and she was sufficiently acquainted with Tom's history to render this perplexity the greater. She was certain Mrs. Pendrill had heard the name of her expected guest, and it had aroused no emotion in her. Yet she would presumably know the name of a lady towards whom her nephew cherished so great an antipathy. Monica could not make it out. But one thing was plain enough: those two were sworn foes, and intended to remain so—and they were guests beneath the same roof!

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

AN ENIGMA.

It was a relief when the other men came in, and when dinner was announced. Randolph evidently knew nothing of any disturbing element in the party as he handed Beatrice in to dinner, and again made a sort of attempt to introduce her to Tom, who was seated opposite, not knowing that Monica had already had an opportunity of performing that little ceremony.

"You are two of my oldest friends, you know," said their host, in his pleasant, easy fashion, "and you are both my guests now, so you will have a capital opportunity

of expatiating together upon my many perfections."

"No need for that, Randolph," answered Beatrice, gaily. "They speak too loud for themselves, and your wife's eyes tell too many tales of them. You know I never could bear paragons. If you turn into one, I shall have no more to say to you."

"You are very cutting, Beatrice; almost as much so as Tom here. It is really rather a trying position to be hedged in between a clever woman and a clever man."

"If you call me a clever woman again, Randolph, I'll never forgive you. I abominate the whole race!" cried Beatrice, hotly; "and as for clever men—I *detest* them!"

This was said so heartily as to elicit a guffaw of laughter from a ruddy-faced

young gentleman of sporting tastes, who was her neighbour on the other side. She turned to him with one of her most sparkling glances.

"Now you, I am quite certain, agree with me. Your face tells me you do. Don't you think that it is the clever people who make the world an intolerable place?"

"They're the greatest nuisance out," assented that young gentleman, cordially. "I always did say so. I was never clever. I was plucked three times, I think, for my little-go."

"Then you and I are sure to be great friends," said Beatrice, laughing. "I am quite, quite sure I should *never* have passed any examination if I had been a man. I was at Oxford once, long ago; and oh! you know, the only men that were

any good at all were those who had been 'plucked,' as they call it, or fully expected to be. The clever, good, precocious boys were—oh! well, let us not think of them. It takes away one's appetite!"

The sporting gentleman laughed, and enjoyed this summary verdict; but Randolph just glanced across at his wife. He, too, was aware that there was something odd in Beatrice's manner. He detected the covert vein of bitterness in her tone; and he was as much at a loss to understand it as any one else could be. Tom's face and impenetrable silence puzzled him likewise.

Dinner, however, passed smoothly enough. Beatrice was very lively, and her witticisms kept all the table alive. Her young neighbour lost his heart to her at once, and she flirted with him in the most frank and open

fashion possible. She could be very fascinating when she chose, and to-night, after the first edge had been taken off her sallies, she was, undoubtedly, exceedingly attractive.

If there was something a little forced in her mirth, at least nobody detected it, save those who knew her very well, and not even all of those, for Haddon was obviously unconscious that anything was wrong, and talked to Monica in the most unconcerned fashion possible. What Tom thought of it all nobody could hazard an opinion.

At length Monica gave the signal to her animated guest, and they two withdrew together. Beatrice laughed gaily, as she half walked half waltzed across the hall, humming a dance tune the while.

"What a lovely place this would be for

a dance!" she exclaimed, "a masked, or, better still, a fancy dress ball. Shouldn't we look charming in these panelled rooms, flitting about this great baronial hall, and up and down that delightful staircase? Monica, you and Randolph mustn't get lazy; you must live up to your house. It is too beautiful to be wasted. If you don't know how to manage matters, I must come and teach you?"

And so she rattled on, first on one theme, and then on another, in restless, aimless fashion, as people do who are talking against time, or talking with a purpose, determined not to let silence fall between them and their companions. It was easy to see that Beatrice wished to avoid any confidential conversation—wished to escape from any kind of questioning, or from quiet

talk, of whatever description it might be. When at length she did let Monica go back to the drawing-room, it was not with any idea of silence. She went straight to the piano, and began playing stormily.

Presently, after dashing off fragments vocal and instrumental in a sort of confused medley, Monica, growing dreamy as she listened to the succession of changing harmonies, she began once again with more of purpose and of passion in her voice —indeed, there was so much of pain and passion, that Monica was aroused to listen.

"My heart, my heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart, my heart is like an apple-tree,
Whose boughs are hung with thick-set fruit.
My heart, my heart is like a rainbow-shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart, my heart is gladder than all these,
Because my love, my love has come to me.
My heart——"

And then the singer's voice failed utterly; a dismal discordant chord broke the eager harmonies that had followed one another so rapidly. Beatrice broke into a sudden storm of tears, and hurried from the room without a word.

Monica sat aghast and bewildered. What could it all mean? Was she by chance to come upon the secret sorrow of Beatrice's life?—the sorrow she had half suspected sometimes, but had never heard in any way explained. Was it to be explained to her now? Was Tom Pendrill connected with that sorrow? If so, what part had he taken? Could they ever have been lovers? Did she not remember, long ago, hearing something of a suspicion on Mrs. Pendrill's part that Tom had been "jilted" by the woman he loved? Was

there not a time, long ago, when he was not the reserved, cynical man he affected now to be; but was genial, brilliant, the pleasantest of companions? Yes, Monica was sure of it—was certain that he had changed, and changed somewhat suddenly, many years since; but she had paid but little heed to the matter then, as it was about that time when every faculty was absorbed in watching over Arthur, who long lay hovering between life and death. Changes after that passed almost unheeded. Had not her whole life been changed too?

She did not follow Beatrice, however, to try and comfort her, or attempt to force her confidence. She treated her as she would wish herself to be treated in similar case; and shortly after the gentlemen had

joined them, had the satisfaction of seeing Beatrice come back as brilliant and full of vivacity as ever, and there was no need after her appearance, to wonder how the evening should be passed, it seemed quite sufficient entertainment for the company to sit in a circle round her, and hear Beatrice talk. Tom Pendrill was the one exception. He did not attempt to join the magic ring. He took Monica a little apart, and talked over with her the latest news from Germany.

When the guests had departed, and Beatrice, as well as her brother and Monica, had gone upstairs, Tom turned his face towards Randolph with its hardest and most cynical look.

"Tell you what, Trevlyn, don't you ask that poor young fellow Radlet here again,

so long as that arrant flirt is a guest under your roof."

Randolph simply smiled.

"The 'arrant flirt,' as you are polite enough to call my guest, is one of my oldest friends. Kindly keep that fact in mind in talking of her to me."

"I am not talking of her. I am talking of poor young Radlet."

"It seems to me that poor young Radlet, as you call him, is very well able to take care of himself."

"Oh, you think that, do you? Shows how much *you* know! Can't you see she was doing her very best to enslave his fancy, and that he was falling under the spell as fast as ever he could?"

"Pooh! Nonsense!" answered Randolph; "they were just exchanging a

little of the current coin that is constantly passing in gay society. Young Radlet is not a green-horn. They understand their game perfectly."

"She does, of course—no one better; but it's a question if he does."

"Well, he's a greater fool than he looks, if he does not!" answered Randolph. "Does he expect a girl like Beatrice Wentworth to be enslaved by his charms in the course of a few hours? The thing's a manifest absurdity!"

"Possibly; but that woman can make a man think anything."

Randolph looked at his friend with some attention.

"You seem to have formed very exhaustive conclusions about Lady Beatrice Wentworth."

It almost seemed as if Tom coloured a little as he turned impatiently away.

Next day Beatrice seemed to have regained her usual even flow of spirits. She met Tom at breakfast as she would meet any guest under the same roof, and neither courted nor avoided him in any way. He seemed to take his cue from her; but his face still wore the thin-lipped cynical expression that betrayed a certain amount of subdued irritation. However, sport was the all-prevailing topic of the hour, and as soon as breakfast was concluded, the men departed, with the dogs and keepers in their wake.

"What would you like to do, Beatrice?" asked Monica when the sportsmen had disappeared. "We have the whole day before us."

"Like to do? Why, everything must be delightful in this lovely out-of-the-world place. Monica, no wonder you are just yourself—not one bit like any one else—brought up here with only the sea, and the clouds, and the sunshine for companions and playmates. I used to look at you in a sort of wonder, but I understand it all now. You ought always to live at Trevlyn—never anywhere else. What should I like to do? Why, anything. Suppose we ride. I should love to gallop along the cliffs with you. I want to see the queer little church Haddon described to me, where you were married, and the picturesque little town where—where Randolph and he put up on the eve of that day. I want to see everything that belongs to your past life,

Monica. It interests me more than I can express."

Monica smiled in her tranquil fashion.

"Very well; you shall gratify your wish. I will order the horses at once. If we go to St. Maws, I ought to go and see Aunt Elizabeth—Mrs. Pendrill that is, aunt to Arthur, and to Tom Pendrill and his brother. She is sure to want us to stay to luncheon with her if we do. She will be all alone; Tom here, and Raymond on his rounds. Would you dislike that, Beatrice? She is a sweet old lady, and seems more a part of my past life than anything else I can show you, though I could not perhaps explain why."

A curious light shone in Beatrice's eyes.

"Dislike it! I should like it above everything. I love old ladies. They are

so much more interesting than young ones, I often wish I were old myself—not middle-aged, you know, but really old, *very* old, with lovely white hair, and a waxen face all over tiny wrinkles, like my own grandmother—the most beautiful woman without exception that I ever saw. Yes, Monica, let us do that. It will be delightful. Why did you never mention the Pendrills to me before ?"

She put the question with studied carelessness. Yet Monica was certain it was asked with effort.

"Did I not? I thought I used to tell you so much about my past life."

"So you did; but I never heard that name."

"You knew Arthur was a Pendrill."

"Indeed I did not. He was always

Arthur to you. I wonder I never asked his surname; but somehow I never did. I had a vague idea that some such people as these Pendrills existed; but I never heard you name them."

"Perhaps you heard, and forgot it?" suggested Monica tentatively.

"That I am sure I never did," was the very emphatic answer.

Beatrice was delighted with her morning's ride. It was a beautiful autumn day, and everything was looking its best. The sea flashed and sparkled in the sunlight; the sky was clear and soft above them, the horses, delighted to feel the soft turf beneath their feet, pranced and curvetted and galloped, with that easy elastic motion that is so peculiarly exhilarating.

The girl herself looked peculiarly and vividly beautiful, and Monica was not surprised at the affectionate interest Mrs. Pendrill evinced in her from the first moment of introduction.

But she was a little surprised at the peculiar sweetness of Beatrice's demeanour towards the old lady. Whilst retaining all her arch brightness and vivacity, the girl managed to infuse into her manner, her voice, and her words something gentle and deferential and winning that was inexplicably fascinating; all the more so from its evident unconscious sincerity.

Mrs Pendrill was charmed with the beauty and sweetness of the girl, and it seemed as if Beatrice on her side was equally fascinated. When the time came to say good-bye, and the old lady held both her

hands, and gazed into her bright face, as she asked for another visit very soon, she stooped suddenly, and kissed her with pretty, spontaneous warmth.

"Come again! Of course I will, as often as Monica will bring me. Good-bye, Mrs. Pendrill—Aunt Elizabeth I should *like* to say"—with a little rippling laugh. "I think you are just fit to be Monica's 'Saint Elizabeth.' Is it the air of this place that makes you all so perfectly delightful? I shall have to come and live here too, I think."

And as she and Monica rode home together over the sweeping downs, Beatrice turned to her after a long pause of silence and said:

"Monica, it was a dangerous experiment asking me to Trevlyn."

"Why?"

"Because I don't feel as if I should ever want to leave it again. And I'm a dreadful sort of creature when I'm bent on my own way."

Monica smiled.

"You will have to turn me out neck and crop in the end, I firmly believe. I feel I should just take root here, and never wish to go."

Monica shook her head with a look of subdued amusement.

"I am very glad it pleases you so much; but do you know, Beatrice, I think you will have a different tale to tell in a week or two? You cannot realise, till you have tried it, how solitary and isolated we are, especially as the winter draws on. Very soon you will think it is a dreadfully lonely

place — a sort of enchanted castle, as Randolph used to call it; and you will be pining to get back to the gay, busy whirl of life, that you have left behind."

Monica stopped short there struck by the strange look turned upon her by her companion. Beatrice's face had grown grave and almost pale. A curious wistful sadness shone in her eyes; it almost seemed as if tears glistened on the long lashes.

Her words were almost as enigmatical as her looks.

She gazed at Monica for a moment speechlessly, and then softly murmured:

"Et tu Brute!"

END OF VOLUME II.

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